

# THE CANKER AT THE HEART

BY  
L. COPE CORNFORD




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RR Mrs Roberts.

A faint, grayscale background image of classical architectural columns, possibly from a temple or library, with several columns visible in a row.

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**THE CANKER AT THE HEART**

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To  
Colonel H. H. Roberts  
with the author's kind regards.

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# THE CANKER AT THE HEART

BEING STUDIES FROM  
THE LIFE OF THE POOR  
IN THE YEAR OF GRACE

1905

BY

~~J. L. COPE CORNFORD~~

*L. Cope Cornford*

LONDON

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1905





TO  
THE ENGLAND OF OUR DREAMS



## PREFATORY NOTE

WHAT is called the Problem of the Unemployed is, of course, a problem in economic science. So much wealth in such and such hands, so little in such other hands; so many men automatically displaced here, some few finding employment there; a great multitude perpetually forced upon the verge of starvation; neat arrangement of statistics; and ever the same result. We have all had the opportunity of acquainting ourselves with the figures. They represent a vast army of men and women who are perpetually prohibited from getting the means of livelihood. With the why and the how of that pitiless and immitigable prohibition, is the theory of the problem concerned. It is, of course, essential that the conditions of the theory should be clearly apprehended.

But, the study of theory, essential as it is, does but beget theory. It is apt to be forgotten that the economic presentation of the matter must neces-

## PREFATORY NOTE

sarily, for the sake of abstract lucidity, deal with living and suffering men and women as numerical units. They are conventionalized figures, like the men and women of Egyptian painting. They look at us from the printed page, silent and lifeless algebraical abstractions. And so their desperate case, as proved by mathematics, awakens no human sympathy. It is the theory appealing to the philosopher, rather than the living voice of men and women calling for help in a disastrous fight. But, they are the men and women and the children—and the children—who are the living realities. You shall never know their need, save by seeing it as it is. When the House of Commons refused to pass the provision of the Unemployed Bill, which gave power to raise and to expend public money in the employment of the workless, it was thinking, in all probability, of economic theory. It may have been right in its action, or it may have been wrong—I do not know.

But, it is not untimely to recall the parallel instance in Parliamentary history, which took place more than a hundred years ago. The long war, the heavy taxation, and the bad harvests had brought the poor to a desperate condition,

## PREFATORY NOTE

comparable with the condition resulting to-day from our industrial system. That condition was perfectly well known to William Pitt—perhaps the greatest of England's Prime Ministers. Indeed, his life was not safe from the mob. But, he took no action; until, upon a day, a friend took him for a walk through a distressed part of the country. Pitt said never a word; but, he went home and drafted a Bill which, for boldness of conception and breadth of range, has never since been approached. The Benthamites, the men of economic theory, would not have it. Not even Pitt, the wisest, strongest, and most cunning of statesmen, could prevail against the principle of restricting the action of the State within fixed limits. So Pitt's great measure was killed. To-day, we are visited with the consequences.

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the courtesy of the proprietors of *The Standard*, who have given me permission to republish these studies.

L. C. C.

LONDON, *November*, 1905.



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*'Death in the right cause, death in the wrong cause,  
trumpets of victory, groans of defeat':*

*Yes; and it's better to go for the abbey than chuck  
your old bones out in the street.*

*Life is a march and a battle (there's some of us make  
it a kind of review);*

*But how if you never get out on parade, and there's  
not any fighting to do?*

*Hands in your pockets, eyes on the pavement, where in  
the world is the fun of it all? . . .*

*W. E. Henley.*



# I

## AT THE STREET CORNER

**I**N what manner does the honest workman, who has lost his job, put in his time? And how does he support life—he and his wife and his children? Let us hear the men's own account of the matter; first making sure that they are not pitching a yarn. One way to make sure is by hearkening to their talk among themselves. There are others—but, in a word, you must trust to me to distinguish.

Your decent workman, who is existing on from day to day, searching for the work he is always just too late to get, has not learned the arts of the loafer, so that his existence becomes a process of slow torture. You shall see it beginning.

Two men are dragging slowly along West Ham Lane, in the dusty chill of an October evening. They have the earth-coloured, loose corduroys of the labourer, and their heavy, nailed boots gride along the pavement. They are talking earnestly, in a continuous low growl. Sometimes both are

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growling at once; sometimes one is gloomily heeding the other. As there would be no use in lying to each other, what they are saying will be true talk. It is a disconnected narrative, as usual, with pieces constantly repeated, also as usual.

"An' so I walked down to Leytonstone, where I did a bit of work last year, and, 'No good, mate,' they says, and I come back. An' then I walks to that new job, you know, what old Bill was a-workin' at, an' the gates was shut. I reckon I done twenty mile," says one.

"Ah," says the other, "an' I could have got a job at Greenwich—could a' got it, mind you. I walks there, an', 'Where do you live, mate?' says the ganger-man. 'West 'Am,' I says, 'and have, this forty-five year.' 'Then we don't want you, mate,' says the ganger-man. 'Greenwich men here,' he says. And back I comes."

"I don't know what things is a-comin' to," and "We got to starve, seemin'ly," they said, both together; and the growl went on. "Twenty-five mile that day"—"'So get out of it, mate,' says the ganger-man'"—"I got 'undreds outside my gates, now'"—"An' have you got a letter?" he says. 'What letter?' I says. 'I come for work.' 'If you ain't got a letter from the yard, you're no good here,' he says."

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“‘Bloomin’ fine thing,’ I says, ‘to be sugared about like this ’ere’”—and so on.

We turned the corner, and the men stopped, apparently from force of habit, outside a public-house. There was no question of going in—those good days were gone by. They never even glanced at the swing doors. They stood at the edge of the pavement, hands in pockets, and the eager wind blew the dust upon them.

One was a thick-built, short man, with a shrewd grey eye, and hair grizzled at the temples. The line from the nostril to the chin was drawn rigid; the mouth set under the dusty moustache. The square face was cast into a mask of hopeless endurance.

The other man was bent forward from his powerful shoulders, curved like a fish. His face was like a fish, the mouth set a little open, the eyes, all inflamed with the wind and dust, vacantly scrutinising. He had the scar of a burn under his ear, and the scanty black hair grew away from it. So they stood like men under a spell, held purposeless and idle and hungry by an iron hand they could not see.

“Well, how’s business?”

Both men glanced at me, for the first time. Neither changed his expression by a hair.

“Very bad, old mate,” said the grey-eyed man.

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"Ah," said the man who was like a fish, and who had a singular habit of twisting his body from the waist, and peering from his half-closed red eyes, with his chin up. "I 'ad four weeks' work in sixteen. Four weeks out o' sixteen."

"Five months I ain't 'ad a job, except a day or two put in 'ere and there, you understand," said the other. "Same as Jim, 'ere. Same as all on us."

"Five and forty year I lived 'ere," said Jim, peering towards me. "Nor never been out of a job till now."

Three men, heavy, rugged figures, went by with bowed shoulders. They went by with a turn of the hand, and a word, the salutation that runs throughout the ranks of labour.

"More of you?"

"Ah. There's plenty about," said the grey-eyed man. He shifted from one foot to the other, and beat them on the pavement. The wind grew sharper as the sun went down. The rusty red roofs of the poor cottages beyond the church took the cold light. There was no smoke rising from the chimneys. No fire for the man chilled to the bone and hungry, when he came home in the dusk. "There's nothing doing hereabout, nothing at all. And go where you will, 'tis the same. Down in the country there's crowds out-

## AT THE STREET CORNER

side every job. I done ten years in the gas-works, when I come home from the sea, and five years with old Tom Morris—you may have heard of 'im—and six years with the railway. That'll show you if I can work."

"Why did you leave the sea?"

"I left it to settle down," said the grey-eyed man, briefly. "Lived in the same house for twenty year, then moved to the little cottage by the gas-works, what has a bit of creeper over the windows."

Four more men went by, with the same bowed and slouching gait, the same gesture of salutation, briefly acknowledged, and passed into the dimness of the squalid, noisy street.

"One month out of four in work—do you mean to tell me you have lived on that for the other three months?"

"Believe or not," said the grey-eyed man, "It's as I tell you."

"It ain't fattening," added Jim.

"Of course I believe it. But how is it done?"

"The old woman," said Jim, "she doos a bit of washing. Then our things go to the shop what has three gold balls—you understand? She's a-going to take her own linen, poor old soul, now. Then one gets a bit from another, and so on. But Heaven knows how it is done, if you ask me. I

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tell you straight, I don't believe I've had four shillin' worth of food in a month."

"The rent? The landlord, he 'as to wait till he can get it, same as us," said the grey-eyed man. "I tell you, now, I have a son, what earns nine shillings a week. Seven-and-six is my rent. And I have a lodger what pays me 'alf-a-crown—when he does pay. So I pays five shillin' rent. That leaves four shillin' for me, and the boy, and the missus. Four shillin' a week for three people."

"What about the Unemployed Register?"

For the first time the set look upon the grey-eyed man's face lighted into animation.

"I put my name down, eleven weeks ago. Eleven weeks. An' the first thing they wants to know is when I was born! An' what did I get the other day? A printed notice, like, requestin' me to, if you please, inform them when I got a job, an' if any more hands was required on it. *Me* to inform *them*, mark you! 'Tis a likely thing! 'Twas them to inform *me*, I had thought. An' if there was some more hands wanted, I knows a friend or two o' my own, without a-goin' to the committee." He jerked his thumb towards Jim, peering fish-like over his shoulder.

"I ain't put my name down," said Jim, shortly.  
"Tain't no use."

## AT THE STREET CORNER

"Me to inform them—and when was I born—and eleven weeks for to do as much as that! Insulting of us, I call it," said the grey-eyed man.

"It's the clurks," said Jim, explanatorily. "Them clurks, they don't know nothin' of the labour trade. How should they?" He twisted about, and suddenly broke into wrath. "Look at the way the money what come down from London last year was spent! A disgrace, that's what it is. Two or three men took on for a day here, and two days there, and then getting the chuck. An' no single men allowed—'twas the married had first choice. And no one certain of employment, except fifteen men what was kept on all the time. And why? Why, I ask you, should them fifteen be kept on all the time an' the others not?"

"How did they work? Did they work well?"

"As well as they could, poor devils," said the grey-eyed man, while Jim, swaying, his upturned face peering at the white church-tower in front of us, relapsed into silence. "Some on 'em was painters and such, or clurks, an' they had their hands cut an' bleeding and had to jack it up, poor blokes. It stands to reason." He spread a thick, dusky, padded hand open before me. "Even our hands has to get used to it, and gets a blister, swinging a fourteen-pound 'ammer.

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And we what's been out o' work, and not much food, you understand, we has to get into the trench and go a-heaving as quick as a man what's had his belly-full of tommy every day, or else it's the get-out from the ganger-man."

"It is so," said Jim. "Three weeks I worked near Picc'dilly-circus, a-fillin' the skep at the bottom of the shaft, wet to the waist all the time, and drowned in sweat, so's I had to take off my shirt and put on another. But I had to do it."

"And they wants to drive us out of England," said the grey-eyed man, "while they lets the aliens in. Years ago I asked the question. I asked, What's the biggest city in the world what was taken without the firing of a shot? Why, the City o' London. The aliens, they took the lot, the Jews did. Without firin' a shot."

"There's a lot o' dirty dogs," said Jim, with another angry writhe, "what creep and crawl into the Corp'ration jobs. I ain't never crawled, nor I never will. I can't wear two 'eads under one cap, nor never could. An' when I feels a thing, I says it. It's my character."

"We always knowed," said his friend, with the glimmer of a smile lighting his dreary face, "that when you has a thing to say, you don't forget to say it."



## AT THE STREET CORNER

"Mind when I cleared out the boss and the ganger-man that night, old mate, me being a bit on?" said Jim, with a momentary consolation in recalling past triumphs. "'Get out, you swine!' I says. And they run like rabbits."

"Well, we can't turn in and turn out of a job now," said the other. "That's all over. What's a-going to happen?"

"Ah!" said Jim. "What is a-goin' to happen? Starve, or what?"

The other man said something about "shot and shell." Jim, with a sort of gloomy relish, said he had heard that troops were being quartered in the place.

"When are you going home?" I asked.

"Not till after dark," said the grey-eyed man. "Out early, an' back after dark. I don't want the neighbours to say, 'E's back again, and ain't got nothing once more.' So after dark I goes home."

"Ah, that's the way of it," said Jim. "Very early I goes out, and I walks all day, and waits till the dark."

The dusk was falling even then. No one who has not tried them for half an hour or so knows how deadly cold are street corners. The settled, hopeless endurance, the vacant gaze, the hunched shoulders, the feet beating on the pavement—

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that is the picture this very evening of hundreds and hundreds of strong, dogged, surly men, fit for twelve hours' heavy labour daily, and singly desirous of work.

Their state of mind I have tried to show you, as they showed it to me. They have but a confused notion of economics. They do not distinguish between Local Government Board and Distress Committee, between Distress Committee and the agitators' Unemployed Committee. They cannot see why they should be subjected to questioning when all they want is a job of work—absolutely all they want is to be set a heavy job of work that will earn them just enough to live upon. They do not see why they should leave England. They do not see any reason why the municipal bodies should not draw upon the vaguely inexhaustible public purse. And they are extraordinarily patient. But, they are slowly quickening into a dull, obstinate anger, that will presently break into flame. Is that to be wondered at? Remember that, although the best of them are kept in work, because the less efficient, or the insubordinate, are naturally the first to be dismissed in times of scarcity—remember that, were they all perfect, they would have been dismissed just the same. They know that, too.

## II

### THE FURNISHED ROOM

“THE furnished room” sounds an innocent phrase, yet it is a deadly expression. You shall see what it connotes, in the provinces of poverty. The particular locality is of no importance. Wherever in the slums there are single rooms to be let furnished, you shall find the same exorbitant rent exacted, and the same immitigable squalor. Seven shillings a week on the ground floor, to six shillings on the top floor, is the rate, or, to put it another way, about a shilling a day with Sundays thrown in. The family which has parted with its furniture to the pawn-shop, sinks to the furnished room, for which it pays as much as would rent two good rooms in model dwellings. The family which is migrating from one place to another, in search of work or for other, and less worthy, reasons, takes the furnished room for two or three nights, and (very often) ends in staying there.

A dark and filthy passage leads direct from

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the street into the back yard, which is choked with unmentionable obscenities. A steep and broken stair, caked with dirt, its balusters taken long ago for firewood, rises just within the front door. On the left hand, a door, coloured dull red, and crazily numbered in black paint, opens into a seven-shilling room. A woman is sifting cinders on the floor. As the visitor enters, she rises, to begin at once, with the easy politeness of the poor, a domestic conversation. She has the even, tawny complexion of the cave-dweller, who scarce ever beholds the face of the sun, or feels the wind upon her cheek. In her dark eyes lives a latent defiance, instant to sparkle upon provocation. Her husband, who is out of health, sells trifles on a tray beside the pavement. Sometimes he will make as much as 2s. in a twelve-hour day, but not often. There is a boy in the room, nursing his knee beside the fire. He has a fair, stolid countenance, and his clothes are festoons of rags. He ought to be set to a trade : but his parents, with an eye to immediate pence, and with the usual entire disregard of the future, encourage him to sell papers. The selling of papers is, of course, the ruin of such boys. They make a little, they learn nothing except quite delusive information concerning horse-racing, and in due time they are walking the streets, desti-

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tute. There are four children besides our young friend by the fire, who is meditating upon his future, and another, as the lady says, is coming. Ten to twelve shillings a week does this family scrape up between them. Seven go for rent.

The two internal walls of the rooms are wooden partitions, coloured a dull red, the other walls being of a neutral tone that once was whitewash. The ceiling is broken, revealing the laths. A bed, covered with a dingy covering, fills the corner behind the door. Another smaller bed has sacking and an old coat or two upon the mattress. The shelves beside the fireplace are neatly set with cups and saucers, and adorned with pink tissue paper. On the table beneath the shut window are piled two old cigar-boxes, a couple of tattered books, an empty bottle, a plate with a crust of bread on it, a dirty knife, a dirtier spoon, an empty mustard pot, and an old hat. The mantelpiece has its little row of ornaments, gilt vases and china figures. Some miserable relics of clothing are hung on a line to dry.

A pale woman, with a child some months old in her arms, stops on her way out to join in the conversation. She has seven children, has this lady, and she and her husband are both in the penny toy line. Four hours she stood beside the pavement yesterday, the child in her arms,

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proffering her tray of poor trifles, and she took exactly fourpence. Upon the same day her husband made tenpence.

Climb the stairs with caution, and do not touch the handrail as you go. Upon the next floor is the same kind of room—dull red partitions, clouded walls, broken ceiling, shut windows. Upon a little deal table in the middle of the floor are one or two cups, a knife, and a plate on which is a slice of cold pudding, which is the whole commissariat. Here, too, is the spare china, ranged on shelves decorated with pink tissue paper. A handful of coke is heaped in the corner beside the fire. Upon the bed a stout boy is sleeping in his clothes, beneath a rug. He is a paper seller, and he keeps late hours. He is wasting his youth as fast as possible in that disastrous occupation. But, with the rent at six-and-six, what would you have? The woman is down upon her knees, scrubbing the floor. As the visitor enters she rises, and stands for a moment, as if listening. Then she takes a step forward and peers into the visitor's face. Her eyes are wide, and strangely filmed over, so that they are like the eyes of the dead. She is nearly blind, and her case is hopeless, and beside the stout boy slumbering on the bed, she has three children, who are at school. Her husband is a

## THE FURNISHED ROOM

casual labourer. We all know what that means. Despair draws nearer to her every day, looking into her darkening eyes; yet she is wholly apathetic. She has no time to feel, in the unending, hopeless treadmill of daily circumstance—met but never conquered.

In another house, not far off, the mother of a small family is also scrubbing the floor. It is a top room, and the water must be carried up three flights of stairs, for the only water-supply is the tap in the back yard. She heats the water by putting the pail on the fire. On the bed are three small children, islanded there out of the way, and playing among the foul rugs and the sacking. One is a thin, wan child of four, her light hair falling about a smudged and tearful face. She has been “upset” during the night. Yesterday, she had no food all day, until evening, when her mother gave her a penny and sent her out to buy some. She bought roasted chestnuts from a street vendor, and ate them then and there. Her head is burning, her pulse is rapid, her eyes are inflamed. She declines to go to bed, and her mother acquiesces. She must suffer along as she can. Another child, with rich red hair, all unkempt, has just returned from hospital. She was there for six weeks, after pulling over the large saucepan boiling on the open fire. Her

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mother, with a sort of pride, pulls down her little dress, and shows the thin chest, which is all one white scar.

In another house a family occupies two small rooms, the larger of which is lighted only by a closed skylight. They, too, are in the penny toy line, and ten to twelve shillings is the most they can make. The women in the adjoining rooms come together in the foul, dark passage, eager to talk; for talk, though objectless, is always a relief. They are all in like case. One of them has lost a baby from whooping-cough, and barely saved the other child. Another has a husband ill. Another, a husband who earns fair wages and drinks them away. So are they all enclosed in a net of evil circumstance.

Of such are the inhabitants of the furnished room, which is, it is hardly necessary to remark, no better than an ulcer, eating into the core of civilization. The Housing and Sanitary Acts give ample powers to local bodies—always provided that the borough can afford to buy out the landlord—and the ulcer remains, extirpated here and there, to appear again yonder. Deal with the matter how you will, every argument comes inevitably to the same point, the crux of the problem, which, in a word, is the system of land tenure. It is small wonder that every discussion



## THE FURNISHED ROOM

of the question among workmen themselves inevitably resolves itself into the advocacy of some sort of Socialism.

At the same time, it is idle to cast the whole blame upon a vicious system. Much of the fault belongs to the individual. There is hardly a man who, had he the will, could not soon or late wrench himself free from the poisoned kennel of the furnished room, at least. A case in point, among others. A married man, with three children, a casual labourer, fell to the furnished room. He had a vice—it matters not what—which kept him there, and nearly destroyed his family. But not quite. His will was roused, and he broke free. How? By means of his parish clergyman and the parson's valiant body of assistants. They failed, and still failed, and still persevered. To-day that prisoner, escaped of slow death, has his two comfortable rooms in a respectable quarter; his children are well fed and clean; himself is a man to be trusted. He works early and late, and sets his hand to any job, and he makes eighteen shillings a week. He has five children now, and the miracle of keeping them fed and clothed and clean is daily performed on eighteen shillings a week.

Such is the value of the personal equation in the case of the East End parson; a value which

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the social reformer, in the building of his systems, can no more afford to disregard than he can afford to ignore the alternation of day and night. Another instance. You have seen the children in the furnished room, their home. You shall see them when the parson has succeeded in partly removing them from that vile contact, in a different district from the one whose habitations I have (not without discreet suppressions, to spare your feelings) described, but in which the same conditions are present.

In Spitalfields, the Rector has secured part of an airy, roomy house, in which are a sitting-room, scullery, bath-room, and dormitories. Here the girls, whose parents live in one room, so soon as they begin to go out to work, come in every night to sleep. The Nest—as they call it—is under the charge of a lady, who teaches the girls cleanliness, order, good manners, and good conduct. The result is wonderful. These poor children become well-mannered, good girls, neat in dress and clean in person. More : they learn the charm of decency, and they are even able to improve their own homes, and to help to persuade their parents to strike for better things. I have seen one of these girls in her home ; and, poor work-girl as she was, she shone like a star in that dark place. And while this institution is

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the highest form of charity, the girls retain their proper independence ; for each pays a weekly proportion of her scant wages.

It cannot, of course, be said that the institution is thereby made self-supporting ; so long as girl-labour is sweated to the last farthing, it cannot be. But the balance is made up somehow, with persistent effort and self-sacrifice and occasional gifts. For here, as in all departments of parish work, the money is bitter hard to get. The parson, in such cases, instead of being able to devote his whole energies to his proper office, is forced to beg like any friar.

And the children are very many, and they are helpless.

### III

## THE CARAVANSERAI OF THE MISERABLE

“**T**RUE as I stand here, and I don’t deceive you, I walked the streets all last night, and I never made so much as a copper all day. Work? I have been all day tramping the streets for a job of work, but there’s none to be got—that’s straight. Why, I’d take any job I could get. I’d take a job at twelve shilling a week. But I can’t get none. Why not? Well, there, I’ll tell the truth. I been in trouble. I’ve done five years, I have. And I was innocent. I was—believe me or not, as you like. Down the bottom of the street there, an old gentleman was robbed of his watch and chain. He was knocked down, he said, by a man he could reco’nise. The man ran away. Ah! I know who did it. He is doing seven years for blackmail this very minute. Suspicion fell on me along of a little trouble I had previous, in the City—arrested for watch-and-chain snatching; I got six weeks for that. Innocent again. I had my arm across a man, and the

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policeman took me on suspicion. Well, as I was saying, I was pinched one night, in this very street. Talking to two friends, I was, when the 'tec comes along and pinches me. 'Jack,' he says, 'you're wanted!' 'What for?' I says. 'Watch - and - chain snatching,' he says. 'All right,' I says, 'I'll come. But I never did it.' Then I was identified—so they said. And I done three years and nine months at Portland. Hard labour. All weathers. Talk of insufficient food! I wonder I come out alive. I was that weak when I came out, it was like after a long illness. But I'm strong, I am. So now, you see, I can't never get a job. I'm down, I am. Down in the mud. It's want of education. Arithmetic is what I can't learn. If I know'd arithmetic well, vulgar fractions and that, I'd be a rich man to-day. But I ain't got no memory, that's where it is. Born like it, I suppose——"

"Look here," I said, "if you want a night's lodging you can have it. But it's not the least use pitching me a yarn."

"Strewth, I wouldn't do it. Me insides is turning over now with hunger. I'm smokin' this pipe just to keep me from falling down in a faint. I'd thank you for the price of a bed, I would, indeed."

We enter the common lodging-house together.

## THE CANKER AT THE HEART

Two or three lean and shabby loafers, loitering on the steps, exchange grins with my friend. The philanthropist who is disbursing fourpence for a night's lodging is, in their lingo, a "pie." A pie is a person upon whom it is easy to impose.

The fresh-faced, pleasant-looking gentleman, with the particularly shrewd eye, and the particularly decisive mouth, who is sitting in his shirt-sleeves inside the pay-counter, looks sharply at my friend, who takes his ticket and promptly effaces himself.

"He? Oh, I know him. Yes. A bit light-fingered. But none of my business, you understand."

Fourpence was the price I paid for the specimen of the "own-up yarn," which is an old yet ever new device. It has the merits—some of the merits—of truth, and the charm of candour. It is told as my pick-pocket told it, with a frank and fearless gaze of the eye, and astonishing glibness and choice of words. Such men as my pick-pocket are numerous enough; and, together with the confirmed wastrel, they are the persons who most injure the honest working-man who is out of a job, and who is doing his best to get another. The smooth-tongued thieves and vagrants are first at the doors of charity; and, while the scientific type of philanthropic body is "in-

## CARAVANSERAI OF THE MISERABLE

vestigating" their case by means of inquiry among neighbours, the workman has to wait. Moreover, the unemployed workman and the honest casual labourer are obliged, for lack of pence, to lodge with the thief and the gaol-bird. That is the meaning of the common lodging-house.

The manager of this particular establishment, which I forbear to localise, further than by observing that it is in one of the worst streets in London, fell into conversation with the seeker after truth.

"Our position, you may say, is difficult. There's a lot to put up with. We have to know, and yet we have not to know, if you understand me. But a very good lot of men on the whole—you'd be surprised. Treat 'em as men, polite and kind, but so as they know what you mean—and there's no trouble. If there is—why, that man don't get another bed here. The bar's up on him. And the rest knows it, do you see. And most of our customers is regulars. They always sleeps in the same bed—sometimes for years. Why, there's one man been here twenty years, and the same bed all the time. We've three hundred and twenty beds, and only about forty is casuals. So you see."

A gaunt man thrust a black hand into the office, putting four coppers on the counter.

## THE CANKER AT THE HEART

"Number 143, please." The amount is entered as paid against the number, and the man goes in. The ledger is ruled in squares, seven squares to a line, 4d. in each square. Sometimes a man, having only threepence-halfpenny, will come and beg for a bed. This sounds pathetic, but it isn't, the fact being that the man has fivepence, and that three-halfpence is the exact amount which will buy him supper—a bit of bread and a "relish," or a penn'orth of fish and a ha'porth of potatoes. Sometimes the manager will trust a man for the whole amount; if it is not repaid, the manager has to make it up out of his own pocket. Few men—always excepting an appalling number of landlords—can have much to do with the poor without learning charity. Men who fall behind in their rent are turned out of their houses. If they possess fourpence, they send their wives into a lodging-house, and themselves stay in the streets with the children. They find shelter in obscure courts, and cover the children with their coats. Then, if he can, will the lodging-house manager give them house-room in his own part of the place. This happens in summer. In the winter, the cold forces them into the hated workhouse.

While we were talking, man after man came in and paid his fourpence—huge, burly labourers,



CARAVANSERAI OF THE MISERABLE tattooed to the elbow, shrunken, smeared, decrepit creatures, gaunt wastrels, thin boys of twenty.

Just within is the common kitchen. There are a huge kitchen-range, a sink with hot and cold water, and two great open fires of coke. Cooking utensils are provided, and the men cook their own food. They are grouped about the range and the glowing fires, or sit at deal tables, eating and smoking. There is an agonising smell of mingled tobacco, bloater, tea, pickles, and steaming humanity. The walls are lined with lockers, in which the regulars keep their clothes and cooking utensils.

In the basement is a wash-house, and, in a room adjoining, the "snob-shop," a cobbler's bench. One man is mending his boot on a last. Another, stripped to the waist, is washing his shirt. Another, also stripped—a fine, muscular figure—is sauntering about while his shirt dries at the fire. He has only one. It is probable that no lodger has more than one. A single shirt is the rule, even for men in constant employment.

Upstairs, the beds are ranged in dormitories. They are plain iron beds, with sheets, blankets, and coverlet. Floor and walls are bare. Everything is fairly clean—considering the circum-

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stances, extraordinarily clean. The sheets are washed daily, the floors and staircases scrubbed three times a week. A single winding stone staircase leads from floor to floor, to the large, dim rooms opening from the narrow landings. The County Council insist upon external staircases being provided for exits in case of fire.

Such is the common lodging-house, the harbour of the broken man, the man thrown out of work, the casual labourer, the light-fingered brigade, the confirmed loafer, and the man who steadily earns a bare subsistence. Short of the streets, the free shelter, or the workhouse and casual ward, the common lodging-house is the best that such men can get out of life. It offers shelter, warmth, and rest. It herds the worthy with the unworthy. It gives no privacy whatever.

It is clear, therefore, that, while such an institution affords to some quite as much as either they desire or deserve, it is the cause of some hardship to the honest workman. And here, as usual, we strike the eternal difficulty of differentiation. That is always the first difficulty in dealing with cases of distress.

The almost entire lack in this country of the machinery required for the purpose of skilled differentiation has this effect, among others: it tends to reduce all to the lower level. Your

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workman who is forced out of work is immediately subjected to the influences of loose companionship, the settled, attractive fatalism of the loafer, and of insufficient food. He presently loses the desire to obtain work, and then the strength to do it. For instance, I have known a skilled mason thrown out of work because his job was done. He began to tramp London. His money went in a few days. He would have a cup of tea—nothing else—before walking half across London for a job, which he failed to get. He might, or might not, get a meal from a friend on his return. Then, the pawnshop, till all was gone, except his tools. By the end of a week the man was fit for nothing, so he came to the common lodging-house, and began to subsist upon casual jobs. Finally, his tools went the road of the rest of his goods. Now he is a “regular,” existing upon casual labour, without ambition, without hope. What are we to think of a nation which lets its men drift down the tide, to drown?

There was a little, wan boy, with one leg, leaning on his crutch, at the door of the lodging-house. He is the only boy in the place. His father lives here, too, and out of his meagre earnings he buys the boy penny trifles in Houndsditch (where they are invented and manufactured), and the boy peddles them all

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day in the streets. At eight or nine in the evening he comes home, and has his poor supper, and goes to bed in the great, gaunt dormitory.

"They're all kind to the boy," says the Deputy. "Even the roughest. They gives him meals, and there's no bad language while he's by, poor little chap."

## IV

### STONY-BROKE

A LONG column of men, stretching away into the blackness beyond the arch, are arranged, still and silent, along the foul, dark street. The pallid lamplight falls upon the nearer figures, revealing faces old and youthful, bearded and clean-shaven, honest and sly, brutal and kindly ; but every one stamped with the wretchedness that has lost hope. Some one is coughing ; there is a shuffling of feet ; but there is no talking. Two policemen contemplate them gravely, standing a little apart.

These are the wreckage of London ; the men who have no home and no money—nothing at all save the poor clothes they wear. Every night they are lined up thus in a side street adjoining Medland Hall, the only big free shelter, which is open all the year round, in all London. Sometimes, they begin to assemble early in the afternoon. At six o'clock, the policeman gives the word, and the men march down the street in

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single file. They are perfectly quiet, downcast, and orderly. Figure after figure goes by against the dead white wall behind them, a procession of despair. There must be some six hundred. Nearly half are boys of seventeen to twenty or twenty-five, thin and large-eyed. Here and there is a sturdy labourer, earth or lime still staining his corduroys. Many are stout fellows still, wasted as they are. A few are white-headed, their dim features painted with a settled hopelessness. Two or three bear the marks of education, wearing clothing still whole and clean, and collar and tie. These look not to the right or left, but stare straight in front of them with head erect.

"There's a pitiful number of boys, to be sure," says the policeman. He understands the men, and they him. The London policeman carries a warm heart, and the wretched and hungry know it.

The slow procession turns the corner. On the left, beyond the high fence, the masts of ships spire into the mingled flare and shadow of the lights in the dock. A big steamer is coaling alongside the wharf, and the crash of the falling coals fills the air. Not a man turns his head. The ships and the shining water and the turmoil are nothing to them. They are shut out from the

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life of men. Some by their own act, some by the inexorable tyranny of commerce, are cast out like lepers. Only in Medland Hall can they obtain warmth and shelter, and half a pound of bread and margarine. The pale, green gleam of the lamp burning behind the fanlight, beacons them to that haven. Quiet, kindly men, with "Medland Hall" lettered on their cap-ribbons, examine their tickets and pass them in. The sleeping-hall, lined with green-painted wood and hung with texts, is set with open, black-lined bunks, ranged in rows upon the floor, like coffins. There are two galleries, rising one above another, on three sides, also set with bunks. At the further end, is a stage, for clergyman and organist on Sunday evenings, and for those who come to entertain the people with music and singing. Above, are three floors, all fitted with bunks. The hall holds 344 men. First come, first served. A ticket admits for seven nights, not necessarily consecutive. Men are allowed two tickets in the year. As each man enters, he is given another ticket, bearing a number corresponding to the number of his bunk. By six in the morning, all are out in the streets again, scattering to prowl over London.

Always with that dreadful, subdued quietude the men seat themselves on the edge of their

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bunks, and begin to eat their ration of bread and margarine. Presently the coffins will swallow them up, sealed in sleep, which is death's brother—sweet oblivion. Some have brought in a pennyworth of tea or coffee, and these have a tin of hot water served to them. Some have been in luck, and have brought a little piece of coarse meat from a cook-shop. Here is a grizzled man cutting it upon his hunch of bread with a pocket-knife. The man next him is sorting scraps, picked from the refuse of a restaurant, and brought in his pocket, in a piece of newspaper. He is an oldish fellow, with spectacles. Next him, a younger man is standing up, resting bowed shoulders against the iron column. He has finished his bread and his cup of cold water, and his black eyes are staring straight in front of him. His face is white as linen, outlined in a smooth dark growth of hair. The observer will never forget its white misery so long as he lives. Near hand, a tall, gaunt fellow, with his ragged cap over one large, wolfish eye, is cheerily devouring his supper, beside a generous tin of tea. He is sharing the tea with a respectable young workman, a boy of twenty, still ruddy and sturdy, but with purpose already dying from his eyes.

The man with the cap over his eye, surveys the visitor with a friendly air. I asked him



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what was his job. P. and O. deck hand, it appeared.

"On the list," says he. "But I don't get no job. Was four years at the Cape, till I couldn't stick it no more. Three-and-six a day, and find yourself. Things was as bad as they could be. So I come home, thinking 'twould be better here. See?" I saw. He had worked his passage home, and—here came the usual cloudy spot in the narrative. Something he had neglected to do, which he ought to have done, then something else, and here he was, with his woollen scarf and long limp overcoat and indescribable trousers, all stained and frayed to the same hue, and all dropping to pieces, carrying his disasters with a cheerful fatalism. Here was no passive victim. His full, bright eye, long nose, and great jaw told another tale. Someone, somewhere, probably, would lose something before my lean friend starved outright.

In the middle of the gangway, on the top of the wooden cover that boxed in the gas-stove, were three little heaps of tobacco, spread upon scraps of newspaper. These were the cigar and cigarette ends and the dottles of pipes collected during the day. The collector was selling his stock for halfpence. Tobacco is one of the things which the man finds who shuffles along the streets

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all day, his eyes searching every crack in the pavement, every cranny in the kennel. A friend who had occasion to go homewards along Fleet Street and the Strand, late at night, tells me that, every evening, he would pass an interminable procession of these seekers, the last men desperately undeterred by the fact that a hundred pairs of wolfish eyes had scrutinized every inch of the pathway. At sunrise they rake in the dust-bins, cramming into their mouths refuse from which a dog would turn.

From ground-floor to gallery, from gallery to the floor above, still the patient ranks of men, sitting on the edges of their confined bunks, eating or smoking, sometimes, but not often, talking with each other. Here is a boy of fifteen, turning hunted eyes upon the visitor—the eyes of an animal which has found a lair. Here is an old, bowed man, reading a dirty piece of newspaper through rusty spectacles. He wears a faded black coat and the remnants of a collar and a black tie. Here is a sturdy fellow, unconcernedly hopeless, looking about him incuriously. . . . Faces, faces, faces, everywhere faces smitten hopeless, a nightmare of faces. For a passing instant the mind reverts to the suave maxims of political economy, the ingenious, soulless theories, but only for an instant. They recede far off, the

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cobwebs of a dream that is dreamed. For here is the stripped soul, visibly quivering under the lash. Nothing else is real. Come away. There's a fellow asleep already, his coat drawn over his ears, sleeping like a log. Come away from the faces.

But downstairs, in the superintendent's room, the faces come one at a time. The door is set half open, and a chair is placed across the opening. A kindly gentleman sits at a desk, with a pink book of tickets open before him. He is issuing tickets to those who have not already received them, and for whom there is room to-night. A face appears in the doorway, a hand timidly rests upon the rail of the chair-back.

"Your name? Any other Christian name but George? Age? Occupation? What sort of labourer? Where were you born? Number of bunk? Take this ticket and go straight there before you go anywhere else—don't lose the small ticket." The gentleman who is acting clerk to-night tears off a duplicate ticket. "Next?" And another face glimmers in the shadow of the doorway. Here, was a clean-shaven, sharp-featured ship's fireman, age thirty. Here, a boy of nineteen, slack-jawed, sandy-haired, a labourer. Then, a black-haired man of forty, who said he was a fitter, but who looked like a

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clerk. Then, a grim, stubble-headed docker. Then, a bushy-bearded, fox-eyed nondescript, with a high bald forehead. Then, a handsome man of twenty-eight, an iron-worker. Three men out of five were of extraordinarily good features and address. The ghastly waste and the pity of it. . . .

"Look out of the door for a moment," said the superintendent.

Right along the dark street, so far as the dim light revealed them, was a dense column of men, for whom there was no room that night. Each in turn was receiving his dole of bread and margarine, to depart into the dark, and to walk the streets till morning.

At midnight, an almoner leaves the hall, carrying five hundred tickets, each of which entitles the bearer to his dole. The almoner walks the streets till four o'clock. Last night he distributed five hundred tickets, and some four hundred and eighty men came for their bread. Some walked from Charing Cross to Ratcliff for it. Why not?—walk they must, and as well to a piece of bread as nowhither.

The almoner, good, kindly soul, overtook one poor lad, who was walking eastward, fast asleep on his legs. He saw him walk straight upon a brick wall, strike his forehead upon it, spin round

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and fall. He came upon another man sound asleep, standing upright on the pavement. He has seen a starved wretch, pushing to get first to the door of the hall, pitch headlong upon the stones, the blood gushing from his mouth. He had broken a blood-vessel, and died on the stretcher. He has found men and women, upon a cold night, dead on the Embankment seats.

These are not unusual incidents. They are part of life, as life is lived by the poor, and by the few devoted men and women who lead a forlorn hope among them.

I said the London police carried a brave, warm heart, for they know. My friend the almoner told me that time and again he has seen the policeman give his dinner to some poor wretch. "Go to so and so, and you'll find the tommy, and the cold tea—get it inside you. Don't take the bottle away with you, mate." He has seen the policeman helping the lame and the men faint from exhaustion, to shelter and food, and giving them money.

Doubtless the system of free relief, as practised by the Medland Hall people, is all wrong. So my economist friends tell me. It may be so—but I know a greater wrong. It is that such unspeakable need should exist at all. Many a man has the superintendent helped to regain a

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permanent livelihood. Men come to him having nothing in this world but the breast of a shirt, a coat, a pair of trousers, braced by a piece of string, and the remains of boots. That is the exact inventory. The superintendent has found them decent clothing, has fed them, and got them a job.

Daily and nightly are these things shaming England; and, save the few, who heeds or cares?

A word of differentiation. The boys, the youths of eighteen, twenty, or twenty-five, largely belong to the class which has been employed in boys' labour, at boys' wages, such as rope-making, or the making of packing-cases. So soon as they demanded men's wages, they are dismissed. More boys are taken on. The discharged have learned no trade, and they rank as unskilled labourers.

The men over forty-five have often been discharged to make room for younger men. The employer whose requirements fluctuate will discharge in time of depression the least efficient. The elderly are somewhat slower at their job than they were, perhaps; or there is something against them, it may be only a trivial misdemeanour. Naturally, they are selected for dismissal before the others. And, as naturally,

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they are taken on again after the younger men. Which means that they are often never taken on at all. Then begins the process of degeneration.

Then, there is the inevitable proportion of the men who have gone wrong. Then, there are the men who prefer any hardship to work. All these are confused together, and whelmed in the common misery. But there is not one—not one—for whom it is impossible to provide the right treatment. It is the will that is wanting.

## A LONDON NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

THIS is the story of what happens in London every winter's night. At twelve o'clock, men start from various charitable institutions, carrying soup tickets. They range the main thoroughfares from Stepney to Trafalgar Square, distributing the tickets to homeless men. The almoner who kindly allowed me to accompany him upon a night among the nights—as the Arabian stories have it—had himself been homeless and destitute. He knew the game from inside. He had come as a youth from Dublin, had my friend, to take a situation as mental nurse in an asylum. His Irish tongue, with a taste of the potato in it yet, ran glibly through his history—skirting certain spots in it. From Kent he went to a small-pox hospital, where, after two years' service, there was a little trouble in a matter of whisky, and my friend had the key of the street. "Not but fwhat I cud a' gone back again, do you see, but I did not choose."



## LONDON NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT

We were walking westward up Commercial Road, as he talked. The distribution of tickets did not begin until we had passed Aldgate Pump, for the vagrants had been forbidden by the police to hang about in crowded Aldgate. That thoroughfare is still populous until long past midnight. Moreover, the upper part of Commercial Road runs through the alien district; the Jews possess it; and the Jews are shepherded by their own people. It is Saturday night. Lights are flaring on the barrows; the Jewish shop-fronts are alight; Jewesses, dressed in excessive finery, parade the streets, one on either arm of a complacent young Jew. My companion walks steadily on, his cap on the back of his head, his prominent dark eyes glancing neither to right nor left, but noting all, with the sure observation born of the streets.

He had, he said, known all forms of charity—the genuine charity and the other variety. He had been moved to test them in his own person—so he affirmed—rather from a desire to gain experience, than from necessity. He had worked for a year in a Salvation Army laundry, twelve hours a day, for board, lodging, and a shilling a week. Out of the shilling a subscription to the Army was levied and the “War Cry” had to be purchased. Smoking was not allowed in work-

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ing hours. Such was his account of the matter, together with some reflections upon the Salvation Army officer, which I omit. Then he tried the Church Army—still in order to gain experience—and the Church Army was “a shade better.” But these two institutions were classified in his mind as non-genuine charities, which, being interpreted, would seem to mean that, in my friend’s view, they made money out of the labour of the men to whom they gave employment.

At some period of his life, my guide had walked the streets, destitute, for three weeks. “I did not care to communicate with my friends.” It was during this time that he had eaten a whole loaf at a sitting, and had wanted another, and that was a lucky day. Every night he could get a bowl of soup somewhere, “just enough to keep the life in you, so that you can put one foot before the other and keep moving.” All night he walked from one place where he could sleep for a few minutes, till the policeman roused him, to the next. All day he slept in the parks. Sometimes he would pick up enough coppers to pay for a bed in a common lodging-house. But not often. “You get so hungry you don’t feel hungry any more, and all you want is to rest—always to rest. When it rains you get wet to the marrow. The wet is bad and the cold is

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bad, and the hunger goes off—but what you want is rest.”

We were going down Leadenhall Street, now almost deserted, like travellers walking along a valley of grim sculptured stone, in the shadow and shine of the lamps. In a doorway were an old, bearded man, a mere bundle of rags, and an old woman, with a face like a dead leaf, bending heads over some indescribable refuse in a paper bag. They had newspaper parcels and nondescript bundles under their arms and bulging in their pockets—their whole property in the world.

“Them? They’ll walk the streets all night,” said my friend, succinctly. They had no need of tickets, being already laden with squalid plunder. At the corner of St. Paul’s Churchyard three lads of seventeen or eighteen started from the shadows. Each received a ticket, thanked the giver civilly, and turned eastwards. These had the hatchet face and the spare, stunted figure of the street arab.

All still and deserted as we pass through the churchyard, the trees whispering, the august and sombre cathedral towering upon the stars. Curious to consider how remote and set apart is that great temple from the poor life that eddies about its strong walls, drifting hither and thither by night

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like blown autumn leaves, resting on the benches beneath its shadow by day. The quarters chime, and the sonorous bell tolls One as we go down Ludgate Hill.

"Some of my clients will be gathered about here," says my companion. "See, now, under the railway arch." I saw. Shall I ever forget that spectacle?"

There is a bright light beneath the railway bridge. In the full glare there stands against the wall a shocking row of figures. As we approach, a sort of quiver, a tremor, runs through them, and the eyes of all fasten on my companion, and lean, grimed hands reach for tickets. Here is a man of forty, so thin that his clothes hang in festoons upon him. Next him, is a wasted creature visibly in the clutch of death, tottering upon his feet, with the face of a creature stricken beyond all hope. Then, a tall labourer, stolidly hopeless. Then, a weak-faced boy of twenty, buttoned to the throat in an old overcoat. Then, a very old man, the skin of his cheeks drawn inwards, his eyes rimmed with red, wasted and shaking. Then, a bulldog, sturdy fellow, sullenly callous. The hands clutch the tickets and immediately the whole line breaks up and is gone, the men running and shambling to the other side of the road, vanishing into the dark.

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"They will turn and meet me, so as to get another ticket," says my friend, "but I know them nearly all. The boy in the overcoat has met me every night for five weeks. And if they do get another ticket, two basins of soup does not make any matter, I say. One is just enough to make you want more. I know it, for I've had it myself."

As we walk up Fleet Street—it is Saturday night, so that the newspaper offices are nearly all shut—more slouching figures meet us, take a ticket, and pass on. One or two had already received one. All the faces seen for an instant and then vanishing in the gloom began to run together in the mind in one haunting countenance, the countenance of settled misery. No variation of feature, or age, altered the expression. It was a fixed aspect, common to all. Sometimes the expression would include self-pity, or—in the young faces—a look of appeal, like a lost dog's; or there would be sullenness, or cunning, or greed; but always there was the fixed aspect of hopeless misery.

So, all along the Strand, looking in the alternate glare and shadow like a great grotesque row of toy buildings. Here, the cabs are still on the rank, the men are raking the mud from the street, the motor water-cart throbs and rattles,

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and foolish young men, marching in twos and threes, are shouting and singing. As we go westward, the vagrants diminish in number, till we can see the empty pavements running into Trafalgar Square, and we turn.

Back along the Strand, turn to the left, down a passage between railings, to the Salvation Army Soup Kitchen, in dismantled Wych Street. This is not my friend's headquarters; he seems a little shy of the Army, and he waits for me at the corner.

Two or three of the homeless, who have no soup tickets to-night, are gazing wistfully at the shut door. It is opened to me by a courteous officer. Immediately within is the kitchen. Here are a range, a copper for boiling soup, and a counter piled with slices of bread and butter. A weary policeman, shifting from one leg to the other, is keeping guard. "They'll soon be sending them out now," he says. "'Tis two o'clock."

The adjutant leads me into the hall, and I am aware of a vast, black assemblage of seated figures, and of a strong voice speaking. The sergeant-major, standing on a rostrum, is preaching to the outcast of London. He is nearing the end of his discourse, which is of an elementary simplicity. Seated below the grey-headed figure of the preacher, is a row of Salvation Army women—

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blessings upon their good, kindly faces. Opposite, against the wall, sits a pallid boy nursing a violin.

The men hearken, sitting steady-eyed and very still. Some are fallen dead asleep, not by reason of inattention, but because sleep they must. In the front row, a man with a ragged shock of grey hair has dropped forward, his head between his knees, his arms drooping so that his hands touch the floor, his coat collar hunched between his shoulders. The man is utterly exhausted. Glance along the rows, and you shall see ever the same fixed expression. Here is settled misery in bulk ; rags, dirt, squalor, degradation ; and still a gleam of the smitten human spirit looking from the eyes.

"We will now," says the preacher, "sing the closing hymn. *Abide with me, fast falls the eventide.* Stand up, please. All stand !"

The man who has fallen forward, being utterly dead to the external world, is dragged to his feet by a friend on either side. He stands, and sleeps standing, chin on breast.

*Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. . . .*

Heavens, what a full-voiced volume of sound ! The crying of the single violin strikes through it in the pauses like the chirping of a bird between the rushings of a mighty wind. They are singing for their supper, if for nothing else — and who

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knows what vague consolation, what dying embers of old emotions are stirred in those dim hearts? Why not?

The bass rhythmical roar stops suddenly. The adjutant prays aloud, standing. Then, he tells the men that each will receive a ticket as he goes out, which will secure him a breakfast and a wash—the adjutant lays some little emphasis on the wash—at the Blackfriars home. “Good night, and God bless us all and abide with us this morning.”

Outside, in the cold starlight, the men melt away under the gaze of three or four policemen. I find my ticket-man a little way off, and we turn eastwards. The roads are white, and sparkling in tiny points, and it is bitter cold. All down Fleet Street the men are drifting eastwards, walking singly or in groups. At every turn, is the policeman, square-shouldered and alert, bidding us good-morning.

“These policemen here is a very good set of fellers,” said my guide. “They don’t bully the men, or hustle them about, like some. Oh, yes, they all know me.”

He marched along beside me, the prominent eyes staring straight in front of him, hands in pockets, with the easy unvarying gait of the street-walker. The men walking eastwards had



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the same gait, or slouch, head slightly bent, shoulders rounded, weight thrown a little forward, the gait of a man who has learned to keep moving automatically.

St. Paul's chimes a quarter-past two as we pass through the churchyard, the shadowy figures going on ahead and on either side ; so, all down Cheapside to the Mansion House, where, beside the steps, in the yellow flare of light, the policeman stands like a statue ; so, up Cornhill, and into Leadenhall Street. By this time, one seems to have been walking the streets, attended by these bowed and moving shadows, since a time beyond remembrance. The mind refuses to go back or forward. It registers lamplight and shadow, tall black cliffs of building, greasy pavement and shining patches of frost, the single star hanging above the housetops, the eternal bowed and moving shadows. And ever in the dimness hangs the bodiless apparition of the face of settled misery, with the hopeless eyes. . . .

One circumstance presently rises into view. Not a single woman was in the streets after leaving Aldgate, except the old woman with the man in Leadenhall Street, right up to Trafalgar Square and back. These congregate further westward, according to my guide, whose knowledge is extensive and peculiar. Another. That

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the tract of London we have traversed is very small compared with the whole ; and that the men we have seen are but a fraction of the great army moving, ever moving, through the miles and miles of streets.

The economic aspect of the system of free relief by means of private philanthropy may be generally indicated as tending to encourage the evil with which it deals. As a matter of fact, the veteran vagrant can live entirely on free meals—soup here, bread there, soup again, shelter sometimes. And since the food he can get in this way is sufficient to support life, without at the same time giving sufficient strength to enable him to labour, the man is gradually deprived, not only of the incentive but, of the power to work. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that, if he were never so eager, in times of trade depression, like the present, there is not enough work to go round. Also he dies. Sometimes he lasts two or three years or more ; sometimes a month—sometimes less. He lies down and dies in the streets. Verdict, death from natural causes.

“ You see,” said my guide, as we shook hands, “ I don’t worry myself. I say to myself, ‘ Either I get a job, or else I don’t.’ ”

And this is a man who has declined to the

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streets, who has been lifted a little way up again, and who even now subsists on the charity that gives him food and lodging, and that pays him a small sum for distributing tickets nightly. He is perfectly unconcerned. He knows that, if he has the key of the street thrust again into his hand, it will unlock a bare livelihood.

And then, again, comes the damning reflection that, were all such charity to cease, there is neither any other provision—for the casual ward does not fulfil it—save the workhouse, nor work enough to go round.

## VI

### A GLIMPSE OF THE WATERSIDE

THIS is a glimpse of the life of the docker, the casual labourer in the docks and upon the wharves that line both sides of the river from Blackfriars through the Pool to Limehouse Reach and Tilbury. These are the men who constitute what is economically known as the Reserve of Labour—that is, they are taken on in times of pressure, and are kept in enforced idleness during the intervals. The economic suggestion designed to provide for regular, instead of irregular, employment for them is to establish exchanges of labour, so that a proportion would be always in work. The rest would be always out of it. At present, there is no suggestion made as to what is to be done with this surplusage. And meanwhile——!

I can give you no more than a glimpse of them, for the waterside population are a peculiar people. To understand their system of clanship, their code regulating the vendetta, their inexplicable at-

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tachment to the banks of the sullen river, which draws them back to it after twenty years' absence, their strange loves and hates and their stranger virtues, one must dwell among them as a brother, and the setting forth of that understanding would fill a volume.

In the heart of this vast waterside district, Old Gravel Lane runs from Cable Street to the waterside, among mean little shops, deadly intricacies of court and alley, and vast towering warehouses. Here is St. Peter's, London Docks, whose clergy of the St. George's Mission follow a noble, ascetic life of incessant toil. They go in and out among the people, not only unharmed but, loved and trusted by the roughest. Were a stranger to pay a polite call in some quarters hereabout, it is odds but he would be thrown downstairs. But, the mantle of the Church covers all. Wrapped as it were in the skirt of it, let us pay a visit to a docker's family. They dwell in the roughest street of all this district, into which the policeman does not care to go alone at night, at the top of a block of obsolete model dwellings.

You enter directly upon the stone stair, which might be cleaner. There are abominations behind the doors on the half landings, into which it is the business of the sanitary inspector to inquire. From each landing branches a dark passage, end-

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ing in a wall, so that there is no through ventilation. From each side the passage, open the doors leading into the two-room sets. A barefooted boy climbs the steps, and stares amazed at the visitor. He ought to be at school. Probably the excuse is lack of boots. A tangle-haired little girl follows him. She also is barefooted, and also profoundly astonished.

Three floors up, a little fair boy, of three, with pale, wide blue eyes, is trying to reach a door-handle. He says something unintelligible. He wants the visitor to knock at his door for him. A stout, grey-haired lady appears, and takes him in. She is the caretaker, who has one shilling out of six-and-six remitted from her rent for keeping clean the fifty or sixty feet of stone staircase and the hundreds of square feet of passage. Her husband is dead. She has a son home from the sea, and wanting a ship, and another son, a docker, also out of a job. His wife has gone out to work all day in consequence, and the grey-haired old lady minds the two children. "And the rent is cruel—cruel. And always coming round, so soon as you've paid it." These particular dwellings, models of everything dwellings should not be, have recently been repaired. It is difficult, remarking the blotched walls, the crazy doors, the dripping pipes, the worn steps, the dirt, and the

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close, stale atmosphere, to perceive what has been done in the matter of repairs. Six shillings a week is the rent for two rooms upstairs, seven below: being a third or fourth of the total weekly income of a man in regular work.

The tangle-haired little girl climbs up the steep stair to the top, and enters a room about twelve feet by ten by eight high. In the room are a double bed, a table, and two or three wooden chairs. It is fitted with a range, upon which the dinner is cooking. The dinner consists of potatoes and a little bread. The man is out looking for work, as usual. The wife, her head swathed in a shawl, is nursing a three months old baby—a sturdy child enough. This woman has been very ill; she was afflicted with erysipelas in the head. She is better now, though she has had the baby and the little girl and a boy to tend, and her housework to do, and her husband is out of work. She wears the same look of surprise and suspicion as her children. Visitors are not desired. Had not this visitor come charged with a message from a Father of Saint George, it is likely the door would have been shut on him. She is one of the respectable. She never has enough to eat, nor does her husband, nor her children, save at rare intervals. For, when the man gets two or three days' work, the pay of two days goes in rent. Six

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shillings a week for leave to dwell on English ground at the top of a vile block of a human warren—it would almost seem as if there were an inequality somewhere.

The pale daylight falling bleakly into that poor room ; the ragged, barefooted boy furtively eyeing the spoonful of potato in the saucer, which is his dinner ; the little girl, her childish beauty shining through the dirt on her cheeks ; the suspicious, large-eyed woman gazing from beneath the shadow of her rusty shawl, as she soothes the infant—such is the picture of hundreds of respectable homes all along the riverside. Somewhere out in the maze of dock and warehouse and wharf, the husband is plodding after work. But the ships do not come in, and work is not.

But, they have staunch friends in the good Fathers of Saint George's Mission. See that group of worn-featured, shawled women, crowding upon the steps beneath the arched entrance to the Clergy House—see them, each struggling to be the first to receive the parcels of scraps doled out daily, lest there should be none left. The London Hospital sends the scraps from the hospital tables to be daily distributed at the Clergy House. The women have reason enough to be eager ; for, it is the only food to-day for themselves and their children, with a share for the man who comes



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home from the eternal search which cannot find what isn't there.

Extraordinary to remark, too, and infinitely pleasant, how, when one of the Fathers goes into his parish, every dull face brightens as the black-cloaked figure draws near ; and how the children run to him for a word and a touch from the Father, and run away again, well satisfied, to play, as children will. He has baptised his people, and married them—sometimes on a total household stock of one teapot, two cups, and a spoon—and visited them in sickness, though that sickness were small-pox, and taught them, and fed them, and—in a word—loved them as his children. It is the plain truth.

Through foul alleys, with the close-shut windows of the houses opening upon a blank wall four feet away—there are rheumatism and hopeless consumption within—through narrow, lightless courts, between gigantic, dark warehouses, past a glimpse of the wide, muddy river, and the red funnels of a lading steamer, to the door of a tiny row of houses at the end of a passage. Beyond the dark living-room, the door opens into a back yard, where a huge, bare-breasted labourer, tattooed all over his arms, with bristling black hair, is washing clothes in a tub. His great, red, Irish face beams as the Father enters.

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"Why didn't you come to church last night, Tom?"

"Sure, Father, I was busied all the evening making a frock for the little girl out of me old coat," says Tom, shamefacedly.

His wife is in the infirmary. He is more or less in a job all day, and he tends the three children, and dresses them, and washes their clothes when he comes home.

"Well, mind you come to-night, old chap," says the good Father, and goes on his beneficent way.

It is true that the parents do not always care for the children, or wash them much. Soap costs money, and washing takes time. Their training is usually a word and a blow. The school takes the children in hand. There is a school here—among others—for three hundred boys. Generally speaking, one hundred of these are always lacking food; and when there is money, the Church feeds them. How, save by charity, can the children be fed when the parents cannot earn?

Here, are some twenty boys in a classroom. You may almost certainly pick out the unfed by the dull, patient look of them, their tired leaning upon the desk. "They do their best," says the kindly schoolmaster. "They cannot do as well

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as the others—but they must, of course, do the best they can.”

Character is more sharply defined in the faces of these boys than it is in the shining morning faces of the young gentlemen of the preparatory schools. There is another school which has a remarkable sifting and hardening influence, the school of the streets. These boys, out of school, live wholly in the streets, and know every trick and device and squalor of those villanous wastes of brick. Some have fair, open countenances, a few are lowering and coarse, but all are marked with the alertness of the young animal that lives by its wits. And nearly all are pleasant faces. They are good boys these—hardy, affectionate, unselfish on the whole—so says the schoolmaster. Some are barefooted. Hardly any have caps to wear, or would wear them if they had.

One little red-haired chap, with rosy cheeks and large, liquid blue eyes, is standing, his book in his hand, ready to read. He is chubby, but there is an indefinable fragility about him. His clothes are ragged, his feet bare. “He is one of those who are never fed—parents desperately poor,” whispers the schoolmaster. “His brother has consumption; this boy is delicate in the chest, too.”

The little hunched, red-haired figure, with the

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soft blue eyes, standing there, conspicuous among the whispering, keen-faced boys, all unconscious of the cruelty of the ill fate that flung him into a hard world, in which the stones bruise his feet and the cold bites him and there is never enough to eat—let him live in your mind as but one of very many. Poor little chaps—they are suffering, and to suffer, for another's wrong.

Whose? . . .

Through the miles of dock and wharf and rotting stair and weed-grown camber, and the vast accretion of foul dwellings, the river winds to the sea, like an old serpent through its ancient lair. The ships come in upon the tide, and immediately hundreds of hands are clutching to rid them of their burden, and then to lade them again, and to store and to distribute the cargoes. The central fact of the matter is, that there are always thousands more men to do the work than are ever required at one time. The details of it are somewhat complex.

The London and India Dock Company combine owns all the docks on the north side, except Millwall. On the Surrey side another combine owns the corn and timber docks. The London and India Dock Company employs a permanent staff. In times of pressure casuals are taken on. But the shipowners who own wharves,

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who discharge and warehouse, and the wharfingers, employ casual labour almost entirely. On the Surrey side, the Dock company sub-contracts to gangers, who employ the skilled labour of the lumpers who handle timber and the men who deal with grain. But, the timber trade practically ceases from December to May, and, although the wages are generally good, there is always the instability of employment, and always the fatal surplusage of labour.

And this year, owing to the decline of the Port of London, even on the Surrey side the men have not been able to save anything to carry them through the slack time.

These are but the most general indications, which may serve to make clear the pitiless, irremediable conditions under which the waterside people wage an unequal fight for existence, year in and year out.

## VII

### THE HOME WORKER

THERE is (among miles of others) a highly respectable street in Stepney, whose houses are owned by a certain great company. They are each rented by one person. That person lets the part of the house which he or she does not occupy, to various people, to be used either as living-rooms, or workshops. But, since the house is held on lease or on weekly tenancy by one person, it is not, technically speaking, a tenement house, although tenement conditions exist in it. It is in such houses as these that home-work is done for contractors, and home workshops are carried on. If any one from outside is employed in a house, it becomes a workshop within the meaning of the Act, and it is, therefore, liable to inspection as such. The house itself, irrespective of the work carried on in it, is, of course, liable to inspection under the Sanitary Acts. The value of these Acts, like other Acts, depends upon the way in which

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they are executed ; and that, again, depends upon all sorts of intricate personal considerations and circumstances.

In such houses as these, is the misery of the respectable concealed. Sometimes, they have employment, sometimes they have none. When they have employment, it is hard, ill-paid, and exercised under evil conditions. When they have none, there is a dull, blank suspense, and the living "as best they can." That is always the answer. "How do you live when there is no money coming in?" A shrug, a wretched smile, and "the best way we can." Which means an occasional piece of work, the rent falling into arrears, the credit obtained first here and then there, the skimmed food, the staying shut up all day in the dismal, blinded house, lest the neighbours should know.

In a low, small room on the first floor, the grimed window looking upon the street, sits an old woman, sewing, always sewing. Her face is of an even faded brown, with red in the grain of it ; her hair, thin and sandy, droops loose about her ears ; her eyes, looking from a nest of wrinkles, are red and tired. Her dress is of rusty, indiscriminate black, and, seated against the pale daylight, her figure merges into the shade of the window curtains and the piles of clothing and

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loose pieces about her. A large bed, with the lumpy surface and dirty red cover, common to the couches of the poor, fills near half the room. Upon it are laid boys' slop capes and overcoats in various stages of manufacture. The sewing machine at which the old lady sits, is set against the side of the bed, so that she can reach the things on it without getting up. At her right elbow is a board on trestles, on which she presses the clothes. At present, there is a dirty plate on the board. A sullen fire smoulders behind her, with a sooty kettle on the hob. Two bloaters in a dish are set upon the corner of the cupboard by the fire, together with more dirty plates, a teapot, some newspapers, and some scraps of work. The walls are foul, the ceiling murky. It is hard to suppose that the window has ever been opened. Beside the fire, gazing crossways into vacancy, stands a frowsy, stunted woman, with pendulous lips and a squint. She is the old lady's daughter, who, not being perfectly sane, is supported by her mother.

The old lady has worked in this manner for twenty-seven years. Her husband died about the time the imbecile daughter was born. All day long, and far into the night, she sits and sews for a firm of cheap tailors in the City; and then she clears the capes and coats, made and in



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the making, from her bed, and gets into it; and next morning she creeps out and into her chair by the window again; and so on.

The shop sends her the stuff ready cut out, and she completes the article ready for sale. For a cape, finished, she will receive  $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. or  $8\frac{1}{2}$ d.; for a boy's overcoat, 1s. 2d. She can, by unremitting toil, make two capes or two coats in a day and a half. Prices to-day are worse than they have ever been. Why? Partly because of alien competition, partly by reason of trade depression. But the dim, weary-eyed old bundle beside the grimed window makes no complaint whatever. She knows neither hope nor despair, neither pleasure nor any emotion. Twenty-seven years. . . .

In the next street dwells an old, stout lady with thick, rough grey hair, and a jolly, red whimsical face. She has a long, pear-shaped nose, little sly eyes, very lively grey eyebrows, and a broad smiling mouth. She sticks her arms akimbo, and shuts one eye, and says, "Oh no! My two daughters they've always worked in the front parlour of our own 'ouse. But now! There's nothing doing now. More's the pity—what? Show you the rooms? Why certainly. Empty as the larder, so they are, my dear!"

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The front parlour has the blind down, of course, because of those neighbours. Double doors, which are open, divide it from the back room. The walls are hung with a deadly yellow-green paper. There is no carpet. There are a table, on which is a sewing-machine, a board on trestles for pressing, another table and another machine, and two chairs. Not another thing in the room except one reel of black cotton and a thimble. Plain, bare, eloquent, dreadful respectability. One of the daughters enters. She is a slight, pale woman of thirty-five or forty, very neatly dressed in black, with little, white turnover cuffs and collar. She has large, indeterminate eyes, and she wears her hair in a curious intricate system of plaits and small wires.

"Always kept out of a factory, have my daughters," says her mamma, composing her absurd features into solemnity. "They was always too delicate for a factory. Besides, she wouldn't go. And, moreover, I wouldn't let her. Didn't care about it. No. Did we, Lizzie?"

Time was, it appeared, when Lizzie and her sister were able to keep a sewing-woman and a presser at salaries of fifteen and eighteen shillings a week. The four worked in this confined room from eight to eight daily, and often longer, and

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counted themselves lucky. And to-day they have absolutely nothing to do whatever. The sewing-machines have stood idle for three weeks. Nor is there any particular prospect of more work coming in. It may, of course, but it may not. Trouser-making is here the particular industry. Lizzie and her staff used to turn out a complete pair of breeches, ready for sale, at 2s. 6d. "Time was when it was 4s. 6d.," says the mother. "But never no more will that time come. We've had to make up by taking in little jobs, like turning up the hems of trousers worn at the bottom—for, do what you will, trousers will fray at the edges—and tailors, they won't always trouble about a little job like that!"

"And how—if I may ask—do you live now?"

"As best we can," says the old lady, with one eyebrow elevated, and a cheerful grin.

Lizzie stood in the bare, dark room, her work-worn hands crossed in front of her, the wan face and tired eyes expressive of an absolute, uncomplaining patience. She would never complain. That fragile, black-clad figure may stand for hundreds in like case, who endure slow starvation in silence, behind drawn blinds and shut doors, and so die. That cheery old veteran, her mother, has been schooled to a wonderful toughness; she has long outlived her husband, and has

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fought through years of trouble, and is never a penny the worse. Not so Lizzie. She can suffer still.

A little higher up the street, the door is opened by a woman with a countenance of an even hue, like yellow wax. She it is who rents the house. Upstairs, is a furrier's workshop. In the first-floor back room sits a girl, with a delicate and beautiful face, dark-haired and dark-eyed. She is working at a little table drawn beside the fire, stuffing fur collars with wadding, and lining them with satin. For the finished article, 1s. 3d. the dozen is the pay. She can make between two and three dozen in the day; and the pay, in her view, is good enough. At a table facing the shut window, which overlooks a lamentable desert of back yards, sits a fat Jewish girl, working the little, rattling sewing-machine that joins the pieces of fur together. There is just room in this narrow chamber for the two girls, and a dog, as well as a bed. The bed is occupied by the master furrier at night. In the front room adjoining, which is about fourteen feet by ten feet by eight feet high, work four men. They cut the skins to shape, damp them, and pin them out on boards to dry. The benches and the floors are littered with waste cuttings and bits of fur. There is a stifling, close

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sensation as of fluff in the air. The windows are, of course, shut. Two or three chairs are piled with valuable sealskin jackets and coats, sent from a West End shop to be made up or altered. Here, is a sixty-guinea lady's motoring-coat; here, a sealskin jacket, silk lined, worth thirty pounds; another, with a sham sable collar, worth a little less.

It must be interesting to the wealthy to consider in what places and under what conditions their furs are made up. The woman with the face of the texture of yellow wax hovers about, two or three ragged children, with sores on their faces, clinging to her apron of coarse sacking. She is vaguely nervous lest there should be something wrong in the conditions under which her tenants work; which, if it reached the landlord's ears by way of the sanitary inspector, would result in her ejection. There *is* something wrong—for this is a workshop within the meaning of the Act, and six-roomed houses are not adapted to fulfil its conditions in regard of sanitary matters. The people themselves are perfectly contented. The girl of that remarkable delicacy of feature is wholly inured to every circumstance of those vile conditions. "If I did not work here," she said, "I should have to work somewhere else." Her eyes half shut as she smiled

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—you know the look—pausing in her placid industry and looking up. There are not many so comely, but there are many doing the same work, under the same conditions, hereabout. So long as it is no one's business to institute reform, so long will they continue. But did you know the associations of a fur coat, or collar, or cape, before?

Here also is the boot industry carried on. Close by, there is a house in which you descend by a short, steep, wooden stair, into a cellar. On the left, there is a vault under the pavement, covered in by a grating. On the right, a window, close-shut, two feet square, looking into the back yard at the ground level. The ceiling is less than six feet from the ground; the size of the cellar is about nine feet by eleven. Three men are working here, by the faint light from the little window, amid an indistinguishable black confusion of benches, tools, scraps, and boots and shoes. They are finishers. They are paid 2s. 6d. for finishing a dozen pairs. They have neither time nor inclination to talk. One fellow, a great, dark, shaggy man with a hanging underlip, stops his work to listen when he is spoken to, and then he either goes on again in silence, or mutters an unintelligible word. He is probably a Russian Jew. The other, a younger man, is English; but he neither speaks nor looks up.

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They are like prisoners who have forgotten the speech of men. The third, the employer, was absent. The remarkable thing about this noisome cage is, that, so long as only two men are working in it, the space falls within the conditions prescribed by the Act, which allows a minimum of 250 cubic feet for each worker. Which is absurd, of course. But Acts are absurd, very often.

The children of the house are scrambling and screaming about the vault and the stairs—a girl of twelve, a younger sister, unkempt and dirty, and a little boy of three, unhealthily bloated and miserably dressed, with sores on his face.

So, you will always find the state of affairs in the home workshop—dirt, crowding, foul air, long hours—for how can the inspector be always on the alert, when there is nothing outside the house to show at what hour the work ends?—wretched pay, and always the neglected children in and out, and up and down. And then, in certain seasonal trades, such as tailoring, and the furrier's trade, the work stops altogether, and life goes on "as best it can." And the examples I have shown are those of a particularly respectable district.

You will also find, in the East, the alien continually being shipped over from abroad, and

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sent to an address where lives a relative or a compatriot. The Aliens Act is, of course, waste paper. Jews are coming in daily, to oust and to sweat the Gentile.

As there is cholera in Hamburg, the sanitary authority is notified of the alien's arrival, and of the place of his lodging. This precaution is taken in case he has cholera, or any other infectious disease, so that, if he has, it may be well soaked into the house, and the other inhabitants may be thoroughly infected, by the time the inspector arrives. That is another pleasing reflection for the wealthy, whose furs are being manufactured, very likely, in the same house.

You must not innocently imagine that the evil done in the East will not be revenged in the West, soon or late, in one way or another.



## VIII

### AN EAST-END CONGREGATION

WHILE the clergyman is conducting a short and simple religious service, the visitor contemplates from the platform two blocks of human degeneration, women on the left, men on the right. The watery light of that dull Sunday afternoon filters through the windows which are set high in the gloomy, red-coloured walls, and falls upon the nearer ranks of seated figures. These sombre rows merge in gradations of shadow into the obscurity of the lower end of the hall. Mingled with the parson's even, loud tones, is an undercurrent of coughing. The most of God's creatures here present have been walking the wet streets all night, and have been shivering and dozing, sodden bundles of rags, upon doorsteps and public seats, all day. Now does the Church ask them to worship and to pray and to partake of tea and bread and butter. Here, in the big hall, are warmth and food. So they come.

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The mind refuses to register individually so great an array of faces ; some few detach themselves from the rest, to dwell obstinately in the memory, together with the abiding impression of the common aspect of conscious degradation. That impression produces a singular reaction upon the observer. It is as if he himself were unwashed and clothed in evil garments and redolent of tobacco compounded of cigar-ends. It is a sort of physical obsession.

Immediately in front of him is a row of women. One is a little bird-like creature, old and bent, her drawn face wholly void of expression save for the eyes, which are deep-set beneath straight brows. These dark hollows look forth from the wasted features, that once were alight with youth, inscrutable as the thin lips that make no sign. Next her is a middle-aged woman with a hard, plain countenance, who is either affected by the parson's good words, or who counterfeits pious emotion. Her lips move, her head slants, her eyes look upward. She wears a faded black straw hat, which has an incongruous tendency to tilt sideways.

Over her shoulder looks a face which is quite simply brutal. This, too, has that curious bird-like aspect, predatory and latently suspicious. There is no countenance more discouraging than

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this of the woman; the round, hard eye, the bony head of the carrion bird, the cruel mouth. The impression of quite adamant and irredeemable vice is hardly ever so forcibly disengaged from the face of a man.

Here is a man's face, rising conspicuous upon the gloom of the lower hall, in answer to a question of the clergyman's. It is broader at the base of the jaw than at the temples, clean-shaven, dully flushed at the cheek-bone. He is an old soldier, is this man. It is the usual story; the army man thrown upon the streets without a trade, so soon as his time is out. He is everywhere, sturdy and lazy, a spectacle encouraging to recruits and gratifying to a nation that likes to get its national insurance cheap, and with as much waste as possible.

In the second row, at the end, droops and snores a forlorn creature, about whom there is no doubt whatever. He is the professional wastrel. He is all one smear, from his dirty brown locks to his shambling boots. His clothes are a muddle of rags and string. His hands are wholly black, save where the skin shows through in a streak. His face, amid the tangle of hair and beard, is pink and quite vacant, like a child's that has grown up without knowing it. The while he sleeps, the preaching and the singing

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go over him unheard. Near him is a very different type; tall, gaunt, broad-shouldered, wild-haired, with keen, dark eyes glimmering under straight brows; an Irish labourer, you would say. When the lay preacher who has succeeded the clergyman on the platform, inquires if there is any one—any one—present, who prays to God, this man lights up, and grins joyously, and says he does, frequent.

Presently the visitor asks permission to address two questions to this assembly, and receives it. He inquires, first, whether the men agree with him in believing that the chief difficulty, which is present in the minds of those who desire to help the present distress, is a real one. The difficulty is, how to distinguish between the men who won't work and the men who will. A roar of applause, which has no more effect upon the barbarian sleeping on the end seat than if he were dead. The visitor stops to consider that most of the men present, so far as would appear, have never done a hand's turn in their lives. The old soldier with the broad face, rises to remark, solemnly, that the task of distinction would be a very hard one, and the visitor proceeds to his next point. In view of the fact that, as they very well knew, a few years ago, when trade, especially the building trade, was

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prosperous, the British workman assumed an extremely independent attitude, habitually scamped his work, threw down his tools at a word, and drank the better part of his wages, the visitor would be glad to know if the men there present were inclined to attribute any measure of the prevalent distress to the consequences of the conduct described. Dead silence.

“I am to understand, then,” says the visitor, “that you do not consider that the kind of thing of which I have spoken, and which, as you know very well, was notorious, has anything to do with present circumstances?”

A pause. Then an old man with thick, white whiskers rose up and said:—“In my opinion, it is entirely want of Protection what has done it.” Murmurs of assent. The visitor expressed his acknowledgments, and sat down. He knew, and his audience knew, that there are those among the unemployed who are suffering the just penalty of flagrant derelictions to-day. There is hardly an employer of labour who will not assign the whole of the present lack of work to this cause. But the facts are against him. He is only partly right. And even though he were entirely justified in that conclusion, still, we are not to suppose that the men, therefore, deserve absolute starvation; and—a far more

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vital consideration—the wives and the children should not suffer. One always comes inevitably to the children.

The cases of two or three of the men are worth noting, as significant of very many others. Here is a grey-bearded old fellow, with a straight gaze into his interlocutor's face, attired in the last relics of respectability, an aged frock-coat, buttoned to the collarless throat. He holds a master's certificate, and he has commanded a ship in his time. "I don't say," he says, "that I've come down without a fault of my own."

"Liquor?"

The old gentleman nods. "And extravagance—mine and that of others. I had nine children. . . . Now I would take any manual labour and be thankful. But I cannot get it, and so I have to walk the streets, by day and night."

The red-faced man with thick, white whiskers, who had assigned all evils to want of Protection, here breaks in. "Give me a sovereign a week for any work you can mention, and I wouldn't change places with the Prince of Wales." He was a skilled mechanic, was my red-faced friend in the coat fading from black to green. In his case, too, was the slip somewhere. And he, too, is walking the streets.

Next him is a long, lean, ruddy, black-haired

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boy of twenty. He came up from Yorkshire, in search of work. "Ah cannot find it hère," he says. "Ah've been used to working sixteen hours i' th' open air, with good food and such like. I walk the streets all day and all night. There's nought to be got. Ah'm well yet, but him, he's ill. 'Tis his chest."

He touches the little dark man in front of him, with the dog's eyes, and the man turns, leaning his hands on the back of his chair.

"I was two years and six months in the Army," he says. "Then my chest was bad, and I was invalided out of the Service. They gave me eight months' pension, so's I could get well and get a job. I got to digging in the chalk pits, and then I broke down again. I'll never be well."

He falls silent, looking wistfully at the visitor. The Yorkshire boy rolls a cigarette out of broken cigar ends, and contemplates the little man with silent pity.

The autumn twilight is thickening in the sombre, red chamber. The air is heavy with the fumes of bad tobacco and the reek of the human wreckage, which darkens upon the view as the light fails, and merges into an uneasy, coughing, spectral mass of wretchedness. The clergyman rises with uplifted hand.

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*"The blessing of God the Father . . . be amongst you and remain with you always."*

The haggard faces melt from the gloom, and are lost once more in the darkening streets and the driving rain.

What do you make of it all?



## IX

### TWO FIGURES EMERGE

TWO figures emerge from out the great, grey wilderness, and the unending, mean strife and turmoil. The one, sits by my fire, his hands—swollen and diseased—loosely clasped in front of him. He is a dingy man, of a fair complexion, with a trim beard. He talks in low, even tones, and in a curiously detached manner, as though he were commenting on his own misfortunes, from a point removed. He is down in the world—right down. He can easily go lower, because he can still part with that indefinable quality which we call self-respect. At present, he is wholly philosophical. He asks nothing, expects nothing—and gets nothing. He holds a strong conviction that what he calls the social system requires a drastic overhauling; but, he is quiet and composed about that, too. He is like a swimmer who, after long struggling with the tide, has been carried into a backwater, in which he is keeping afloat with as little effort of spent limbs as may be.

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He began life as apprentice to a music-engraver. He learned to engrave music upon pewter plates, whose impressions were afterwards transferred to the stone, and he had regular and adequately paid employment. Then, his health began to fail. He was troubled with some gastric affection, which he called anæmia. He had to give up his employment—or thought he had—in consequence; and having saved a little money, he bought a retail oil-shop business. He also married. The oil-shop, however, failed to improve his health; and his wife drank. This episode in his life lasted for three years. One may conceive its incidents, given a gentle, unassertive person, constantly ill, harassed by the charge of a business imperfectly understood, by want of money, by a wife given to intoxication, and by the cares of a little family, for he had daughters. So much was piled upon that weak back.

The doctors, it appeared, advised fresh air and change of climate for his complaint; and, at this point, good friends came to his help. Provision was made for his wife and his children, and he himself was shipped to Buenos Ayres, “because it had the Mediterranean climate.” On the way out, however, the steward of the ship informed the invalid that Buenos Ayres had not the Medi-

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terranean climate ; or, that if it had, such climate was bad for invalids ; and, finally, that there was the little difficulty of a foreign language. This discouraged him ; Buenos Ayres appeared, upon experiment, to fit the steward's description ; and he came back to England. Then, he obtained a cab licence, and for six weeks he drove a cab. Meanwhile, a legacy had fallen to his wife, so that she and the children were provided for. But, again his complaint returned upon him, and he shipped as steward upon an Australian boat, being apparently under the impression that a steward had the benefit of sea air during the voyage. He went to New South Wales, and would have settled there, but that he fell ill again, and again came home. He went back to his old trade of music engraving for a while, and having by this time become an earnest social reformer, he organised the music engravers into a union. That availed them little enough, because the great music publishers (so he said) began to import German workmen and German methods. Moreover, he fell ill again, and was covered with sores, like Lazarus. At this point his wife died. He provided for his three little girls with her money, placing it in the hands of trustees, and sending the children to a home in the country.

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He was now a middle-aged man, out of employment, broken in health, and penniless. He went to the Salvation Army, which kept him for a while, setting him to work for board, lodging, and 6d. a week wages. He describes the Army as being of more benefit to its officers than to the men. His opinion is, of course, worth exactly as much as his judgment—which I decline to estimate. When he tired of the Army he tried the casual ward, where he picked oakum for a night's lodging. You can go from one casual ward to another in the metropolitan area without running much risk of being identified and detained for four days. He was chiefly impressed by the number of old soldiers he met in the casual ward. Then, he tried the Church Army, which he regards with even less favour than the Salvation Army. His objections are, briefly stated, too much routine religion and too little pay. Having quitted the Church Army, he came to the casual job and the common lodging-house, where he is now. His health is better since he discovered the supreme merits of vegetarianism, upon which he delights to dwell, with the fervour of a missionary. His ambition is to obtain a cab licence again, and again to drive a cab. He does not like the society of the common lodging-house, where he is occasionally kept awake by discussions as to

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the relative merits of various prisons, between gentlemen who have tested them.

The other figure is seated on the edge of his bed, a broad-shouldered, large-faced, simple man, nursing his little boy of two years old. Another little boy, one smudge from head to heel, stands beside him, extinguished in a large cap. A little girl of three, with a shock of red hair, stares at the visitor. His wife is a wretched, worn, slatternly creature, with head bent forward, crumpled features, and a quick, black eye. She was out at work at nine o'clock ; it is now seven ; and she is going out again, to work till eleven or twelve. She does the same, every day, for five shillings a week. The rent of the one disgraceful room is six shillings, and as it is her landlady who employs her, the landlady would lose a shilling on the transaction if the husband did not make it up by casual jobs. For food the family depends upon the landlady's charity, and that of the publican (who is a good man) who occasionally employs the man. The room is all one smear of dirt and grime and grease. The frowsy bed occupies half the floor space. There is a turn-up bedstead for the three children. There is a small table with a dirty plate or two upon it. There is another small table by the door, upon which are dirty cooking-utensils. On a shelf beside the

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fireplace are a few cheap ornaments and a tattered book bound in red cloth. A lamp burns dimly on a bracket. A blackened blind is drawn across the window. Some rags of clothing are drying on a line stretched from wall to wall.

Twelve months ago, the man had rheumatic fever. He was a carman in the employ of a certain company, at 27s. a week. The company kept his place open for him for eight months; but his rheumatism had lamed him, and he was unfit for work. He had been in the company's service for two years. Before that, he was vandrider to a wholesale manufacturer, upon whose recommendation the company had engaged him. Now, he is a broken man, lamed for life. He is still fit enough for hard work, but who will take a lame man, when there are sound men by the hundred from whom to choose?

The quarter in which he lives is full of sturdy rogues, who work for two or three days at casual jobs in the adjacent market. They would not take regular work if they could get it—not they. Liberty is their motto. They are single men, as a rule, and they are perfectly satisfied with their life. These are the people who, having plenty of leisure, have no sort of objection to making noisy demonstrations. They will not work themselves, and they do not encourage others to work. You

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may see them by the dozen, in the house of my friend the publican, handing down beer by the quart. The publican, who knows as much of the place in which he lives and of the people about him as any man alive, is careful not to employ his customers about the house. But my rheumatic friend, the man down on his luck, who makes no sign—the publican gives him a job whenever he can. “I know him, d’ye see,” he says, “and I know the rest, too.”

If you will compare faces, you will perceive the difference. Our roystering casual is chiefly remarkable for a stupid sort of brutal impudence. But, on the broken man’s face, the settled, patient hopelessness is already plain to see.

The other man—he of the anæmia, which he calls anæthia—has, it is true, the untroubled aspect of the detached philosopher; but, even upon him, the old, fatal expression is beginning to steal. But, the rheumatic labourer has no philosophy, no ideas, no foresight, no imagination—nothing save a bewildered, dull readiness to do a job of work, which, he perceives, is mysteriously and pitilessly withheld. And always about him are the three little children, in the one filthy, crowded room, from which he cannot escape, save to the workhouse, and for which he must pay six shillings every week, or be thrust into the streets.

## THE CANKER AT THE HEART

You cannot find these uncomplaining poor men unless you go to look for them, and you must know how to look in the right way. But there are people who are skilled in the art, because they spend their lives in acquiring it. One cannot but suppose that, a skilled differentiation being the first essential of any method of helping the poor, the instrument is already to hand in the persons of—among others—the clergy of all denominations and their devoted staffs of parish workers.

There are schemes, and schemes, and theories without number ; but when you are considering these, here are two figures of men, real men, which it may be worth while to bear in mind. The fair, pale man, sitting beside the fire, his diseased hands clasped loosely in front of him, talking of his disastrous life, as though it had been endured in another planet, bereft of his children and of all he had in the world, and going forth into the streets alone ; and the broad-shouldered, patient labourer, crippled for life, nursing his little boy, and looking pitifully upon the worn woman upon whom he is forced to depend for all. And, behind them, rise a great host of shadowy figures, in like case.

And, in nearly all, there is the slip, the failing, the weakness, of which the man knows, but of



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which he will not tell. But his parish clergyman or pastor knows it, too, and he can tell upon occasion. Even in the two figures that have emerged for a moment from the London mist, to tell their story, and to disappear, the unexpressed personal defect is evident, though indefinable. But the parson could define it.

Here, we touch the core of the difficulty of differentiation. Any remedy which fails to reckon with the personal defect must be fallacious. But, that is no reason for withholding the remedy, and for everlastingly prosing about the "difficulty of the problem." Go and ask the parson. He knows.

## X

### THE SACRIFICE OF THE WOMEN

THE unit of labour in the East is, not the man but, the family. In order to grasp the full significance of this fact let us consider, first, what family life ought to mean, and what it does mean among the middle classes. The natural conception of the family would surely lead us to define the father as the wage-earner, the mother as the keeper of the household, to whom belongs of inalienable necessity the care and the nurture of the children. The State provides for the children's education—such as it is. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to include in our conception the possibility of the father being able to afford a certain sum wherewith to pay for the apprenticeship, or for a course of technical instruction, for his son or for his daughter. They, in their turn, become wage-earners; while they are at home, their wages go to the common purse; as they attain maturity, they break away and make homes of their own.

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Surely, such a conception is not a visionary ideal. One might even assert that its embodiment does in fact merely represent the first essential of a healthy national life. Regarding the family, then, as a living organism, whose health and welfare depend upon the fulfilment of the conditions of our primary conception, it is obvious that any radical change in those conditions would result in disease of the organism, and, therefore, of the State, which is built up of an innumerable number of such organisms. For instance, supposing that the wage-earner be deprived of the opportunity of earning wages, and that the mother must take the office upon herself, in the result every member of the family will suffer, and the children will suffer the most. And it is upon the children that the future depends. That is exactly the position of affairs to-day. Suppose, again, the mother is unable to obtain such ill-paid work as she is fit for, every one will suffer more, and again the children will suffer the most. That also is exactly the condition of thousands to-day.

In a certain by-street, which is reached by turning from a main thoroughfare into a quiet road bordered by secret-looking houses, the windows all discreetly veiled by the badge of respectability, the muslin curtain, and from thence into

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another, in which the curtain becomes a blind, which is absolutely the last thing to be relinquished in times of emergency, there is a tall warehouse, overhung by a crane, like a gallows. The front of the building, to the first-floor level, is open to the street, wearing an aspect of sudden and startling publicity. For here, seated amid a grove of coarse piled sacking, is a semicircle of women, all stitching upon dirty sacks with great needles and thick twine. They wear strands of twine twisted about their right hands, to take the head of the needle. They are powdered all over with white powder—hair, cheeks, woollen scarf, and shawl. The white powder is the flour from the second-hand flour-bags, which the man who collects them from the retail shops is even now handing out from a small cart. He is a stout, short man, with a clear grey eye and clear red cheeks. He says that his life is very hard, because he has to be out in his cart in all weathers, for ever collecting sacks. But, he is so fat and well-liking that he fails to awaken sympathy. It is the dejected, thin, rough-coated pony, drooping its head over shaky fore-legs, that is to be pitied.

There is something witch-like in the half-circle of women, bent over their coarse toil, plying swift needles. Their faces, tanned and dusty,

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have something of the sullen hardness of the savage which one sees in the repellent look of the road-side tramper. But two are markedly distinct from the rest. One has a pleasant, open, impudent countenance; the other is thin, with very dark eyes, which squint, and a certain feverish activity of movement.

The first has no children, but she has a husband out of work—a docker. The second is a widow with one child.

“She over there,” said the pleasant lady, conversationally, “has two children. Speak up, Molly! You got two children, ain’t yer?”

Molly is a thick bundle of a woman, with a square grim face and rough black hair. Her hair and her clothes, and the sacks she sits among, are all powdered over and mingled indistinguishably together.

“A boy and a girl. Goes to school,” says Molly. “I goes home dinner-times and gives ’em their dinner. They’re out in the streets till I comes home.”

“And I’ve got six,” another lady chimes in, complacently. She is the only one of the group who is sitting idle, stroking her knees, and gazing vacantly into the street. “Twopence a dozen ain’t much to keep ’em on. And there’s plenty glad to get it, our way.”

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Twopence a dozen is the rate for mending and patching old sacks, which are then sold second-hand.

"Please God," says the first lady, "I don't spend such another winter as last. I come here first thing in the morning without so much as a cup o' tea in the cold. The children? I kept 'em in bed. Many and many's the time I kept 'em in bed from the cold."

Eightpence a ton is paid for making sacks. The number in the ton varies according to size. My friends consider a ton in four hours as a record. Say six hours. How does that work out? And these are the favoured few who congratulate themselves that they are in work. Away back in the dim, noisy streets, the husband is moodily tramping, and the children are waiting about on the pavement. That is what lies behind that half-circle of seated figures in the open space beside the pavement, plying barbarous toil all day.

Back along those secretive streets, with the inevitable shabby man loitering at the corner, and along a dusky thoroughfare over the roofs of whose houses look the masts of ships, and into a large open yard, piled with great barrels. In those barrels, oranges and lemons are preserved in salt water until it is time to make them into

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marmalade and candied peel. For this is a jam factory, in which women are employed. They are all called girls—that is the generic term. Some of these are girls indeed, unmarried and working for themselves; the rest are married, working for husband out of work and children, or they are widows. There is one whose husband, a sailor, is stricken with paralysis. She is about to become a mother, and will have to leave her employment. What then? The husband of another is a chronic invalid. She is counted lucky to have no children. Of the rest of the married women, nearly all have husbands out of work. Nine hours they labour in the factory; and when they go home, there are the suppers to get, the children to put to bed, the house work to do.

“And I could have this here yard full of girls to-morrow morning at eight shilling a week,” said the foreman. Every day he turns away applicants. If the work slackens, he must discharge a proportionate number of girls. The rise in the price of sugar, restricting the jam output, threw many hands out of work. Business is business, and if there is not enough jam being produced to show a profit on wages, naturally the superfluous girls must go. The relative proportion is reckoned out to a fraction.

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In a wide room, dimly lit by electric lamps, the girls stand at long benches, ladling hot marmalade from a huge copper bowl into seven-pound jars. They are pale, sinewy creatures, with homely, honest faces. In a shed adjoining more girls are washing glass bottles in huge tubs. In the room below, candied peel is being manufactured. The air blows freshly from the river across the quiet yard. There are many worse places than this jam factory. The girls come to it from far—from Poplar, Bow, and even from Kentish Town. To hundreds without the gates, married, widow, and single, the factory represents the desirable and unattainable remedy for pressing ills. Here, again, behind the picture of these strong and patient women are the wandering husband, the neglected children.

Near by, is a sombre square of featureless houses, with blinded windows. In the midst stands a pallid, yellow school building, railed in among melancholy trees. Narrow courts, like tributary rivers, discharge little troops of crying, noisy children into the square. Behind those blinded windows women are sewing—sewing all day long, from eight to eight, in close rooms. For this is one of the quarters of the Jew who takes contracts from the wholesale tailors. The tale is ever the same. He can always get as many hands



## THE SACRIFICE OF THE WOMEN

as he wants. When work is slack some are discharged.

Here are but three instances of women's employment, out of many. That women are thus employed is due, very largely, to the unemployment of the men. Authorities on the subject have pointed out that women's employment tends to become concentrated in those districts where casual labour for the men is the rule. The result, in a word, is ruin to the home, suffering and often death to the children. Yet, I have been solemnly assured by an employer of women, first, that want of employment for the men did not exist—so he said, quite simply, and as though he expected to be believed; and, second, that women were never so well off as when they were working for himself and for others like him. Let us set beside those desperate statements a little statistical evidence.

In the report of the Dundee Social Union on the housing and industrial conditions in Dundee, in which city, women are very largely employed in factories, it is stated that "several of the married women expressed the opinion that men should be paid at least £1 a week, and wives would then have no need to work." Could there be a more humble, a more reasonable demand?

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Three hundred and thirty-one families, in which children had died, were selected for examination, and it was found that, of those children whose mothers had worked both before and after marriage, considerably more than one-half had died; and of those children whose mothers had worked before marriage or not at all, rather over one-third had perished.

"The following instances," says this remarkable report, "are significant. An infant aged four months died from gastro-enteritis. The father was unemployed, the mother (a weaver) nursed the baby, but returned to work when the child was seven weeks old, and continued to nurse it at night. She left it during the day with a woman who gave it bread, meat, and 'anything going at table.' Out of a family of six only two were living; three had died under the age of one year.

"Another infant in charge of the same woman and fed in the same way died at four months old from infantile cholera. The father in this case was a mill-worker, whose wages were stated to be 15s. 2d. per week. The mother also worked in the mill. Two children were living, and five had died under a year. In this nurse's house the visitor found three babies left in charge of a little girl; the milk in their bottles was quite sour."

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And so on. Wherever women are employed, thus the spreading poison works. What is to be said of the manhood of a country, which suffers its women to work like slaves, and which lets the children die, not here and there, but in multitudes, in every factory town?

## XI

### THE CHILDREN OF MOLOCH

**T**HERE are two schools in the East, standing close to each other in a region of rascality and of extreme poverty, closed in on all sides by the habitations of Israel. Presently Israel will absorb this province also, and there will be less rascality, and a diminution (at least) of poverty. The Jew makes a good citizen—for Jewry.

One of these schools is supported by Roman Catholic charity. The other, which is a school under the Act, is wholly Jewish. I have selected these two establishments, both because they have certain points of peculiar interest, which distinguish them from other elementary schools, and because a certain characteristic, which is common to the most of such institutions, appears somewhat remarkably in these also. That characteristic is the presence of neglected and ill-fed children, which is a direct result of poverty; which, again, is due to lack of employment. Or, to be more precise, to the absence of a right

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system of labour organisation. The test of its rightness must be its absolute ability to secure the welfare of the children of the workman. It does not matter in the least what you choose to call the system.

The Roman Catholic school is held in a great and lofty room, whose tall windows open in opposite walls, giving cross-ventilation. The children, girls and infants, sit at long desks of clean, scrubbed wood, which are so constructed that they can be turned into tables. For, during the winter, the room is occupied in the evening by the homeless women who are taken in for the night. Here, they sit in the warmth, and eat their supper, before going upstairs to bed. In certain cases, their children remain during the day in the schools, where they are taught and fed.

As the visitor scans the bright-eyed rows of little girls, it is odds but he will be aware of a strange impression, as of beauty marred, and pitifully mingled with that mute appeal of childhood which is altogether nameless and irresistible. Then, he will begin to distinguish. The individual face looks forth, revealing individual character at a glance. That, too, is nameless—the sudden and swift illumination of character, when the soul looks out of the eyes for a moment,

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and again withdraws. We have but clumsy verbal generalities by means of which to express it; sly or honest, surly or pleasant, or coarse, and the like. But the mute appeal of childhood is stronger than all. And upon nearly all the childish faces is impressed the stamp of comeliness checked, of springing life rudely touched, and withering somewhat. That is the effect of neglect, of foul air, of lack of cleanliness, and of bad food, especially of bad food. In the most of those cases in which children are suffering from want of right nourishment, it is probable that the food they are given is bad in quality rather than insufficient in quantity. "They eat whatever's going," is the parents' phrase. What is going, is usually bread, a "relish" of fish, stewed tea, cheese, pickles, potatoes.

So the effect, in varying measure, is manifest in each child. You may estimate it doubtfully, scrutinising each in turn, until you light upon a wan little face and a pinched figure, as to which there is no doubt. Look again, and you shall pick them out, now here, now there, from that dimmed flower-bed of gazing faces. The result is dubious, of course; but, here is the Sister of Mercy to tell you that there comes unfed to school, of the whole number, one-third, to whom breakfast is given. And that about

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half as many again come unfed, who would receive breakfast, were their parents not too lazy to send them in time. These are the children who cannot go to bed until their parents come in; and who consequently play and loiter wearily in the streets, and fall asleep on doorsteps, till midnight or later, though they are but two or three years old.

They are the poor flowers which these good gardeners, the Sisters, must nurture and train as best they may, when the greater half of the matter is placed beyond their control. Consider the waste of it—the waste of the children, the frustration of effort, the expenditure thrown away! For the State, like a big, blundering stepmother, stepped roundly in, and said, “You shall all be educated.” Then she walked out and slammed the door; and has sat glum in her elbow-chair ever since, merely ejaculating at intervals that she had done all that she could for the children, and a great deal more than could have been reasonably expected. Perhaps she has; but, work so incomplete and hasty undoes itself. Until the idle and the vicious are forced to labour under discipline, and the profits of their labour are confiscated for the use of their children; until the children themselves are taken for ever from the parents who have shown them-

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selves utterly unworthy; until the right of the honest man to work and to live decently by his earnings, is wholly conceded; a great part of the millions of State money yearly expended on a parrot education, might as well be poured into the sewer, and the children of Moloch will continue to be sacrificed.

Meanwhile, there come in good people, like the Sisters of Mercy, quietly calling the children about them, and giving them food and clothing, teaching them somewhat, and (above all) loving them. And every night a part or a whole of their day's work is undone by the parents, left by the State to work their will and to suffer their disasters, unhindered and unhelped, in order that their "independence" may be preserved. What of the independence of the children, in whom lies bound the future? So, in narrowly observing the children, you shall see the parents' evil in the thin, ragged clothing, the outworn boots, and the teachers' clever hand in the brushed hair, the clean faces and hands, the pathetic attempts at neatness, and a clean pinafore. You shall see the parents' misdoing and misfortune in the pallor and the meagre limbs and the thin bodies—the Sisters' charity in the brightened eye and the touch of colour in the cheek. So it goes on; the friends of the children fighting unnum-



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bered evils with one hand tied behind their backs.

Here, is a child so chilled and dull that the light of childhood is almost quenched; but, there is no mistaking the answering light in the wan face, as the Sister goes by. Here, is another, lowering, half sullen, with thick, coarse hair, falling over the narrow forehead—she, too, knows the kindness of the Sister. Here, is a tall slip of a girl, who has been trained all her life by the Sisters. She is fit to take a class, and she hopes to gain a scholarship. And of a last significance are the easy natural quietude of some two hundred children, seated all in the same room, and their look of content.

Immediately without the doors, which close in this benignant serenity, are the swarming, filthy street, the blackguard houses, the hideous turmoil; whence the children come every morning, and into which, when school is done, they must return. Something of their homes we shall presently see. For the moment, let us turn to the Jewish school.

Now the Jew, in many respects, is neither more nor less than a shining example to the Gentile. He is indefatigably industrious, he is sober, and—except in the wildness of his youth—law-abiding. Above all, he cares for his chil-

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dren. Perhaps part of the secret which makes the endurance of the Hebrew race a wonder of the world, is this same care for the child. Beside this bright virtue—though it be but the first and commonest duty—the English negligence darkens like the vice of savages. The question is, then, first, if the child of the Jew is in better case than the child of the Gentile, in a region where both live under the same conditions; and second, if there is evidence here, too, of parental poverty and consequent neglect. For, if the child of the Jew be stronger and finer than the child of the Gentile, on the whole, then any cases of poverty will be doubly significant. For, if your Jew neglect his child, he must be out of even the meanest employment; and, if a Jew lack work, it is a fair presumption that there is absolutely none obtainable.

There are more than three thousand children in this great school, which has grown, in a little over fifty years, from two rooms to a vast pile of lofty halls and airy and light class-rooms, and which is regulated by a complete and admirable system of organisation. Among so large a number, we shall surely find the answers to our questions.

Here, is a class of boys, whose ages range from ten to twelve or thirteen. They are beginning

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at the lowest standard, because they have but newly come to England, and they know no English. They are sturdy boys enough, with a certain indefinable aspect of force and intelligence not invariably observable in the Gentile. Among them, two or three are obviously of very poor parentage. They are buttoned to the throat in frayed, rusty garments, unadorned by the three-halfpenny xylonite collars which the school sells to those who can buy. They are white-faced, with the lost, staring look of the perpetually hungry. One among them, has a kind of dull veiled expression, as though a curtain were drawn between his tired senses and the world. He moves slowly, mechanically. He is to go to the hospital.

Another class, of small boys of six or seven. These are brighter and livelier, for they have come up from the infant school. Here, too, the observer picks out one or two little starvelings, and two children with bandaged heads. The bandaged ones have toothache, poor little wretches; scarce a child in the school but has toothache, now and again, because the parents neglect the care of their first teeth. Ask your dentist what that means—he will tell you; and he will tell you the results, also, with which he deals in the dental hospitals. There is a little

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chap, whiter than the paper before him, with red-rimmed, dark eyes. One eye resides in a corner of the socket; the other peers upon his task. He is an ophthalmic case. Ophthalmia is the scourge of the poorer elementary schools, and of the Poor Law schools.

Another class, of seventh - standard boys. These have been under school training for some time; they are a strong, intelligent lot. One sees but one ghastly, white face among them, and it stands out like a candle among the well-being of the rest.

So, among the girls. Among the little things of six or seven the hand of want is often visible, and the bandaged, patient face. Their training in cleanliness and neatness is but beginning, and there are lapses observable. You are to remember that the water-supply in their homes is probably limited to one tap in the yard, for the use of the several families in the house, and that, if you are very poor, you buy food before you purchase soap.

And so, again, among the girls of the seventh standard, there is the least evidence of occasional extreme poverty. Neat, alert, pleasant girls are these, good at their work, affectionate and amenable. They join an old girls' club when they leave, and the president, who is a teacher in the

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school, is delighted to add the care of the old girls to her duties.

And the Jewish community has the immense advantages of a common faith, of a religion of strict observance, and of a sense of racial kinship which binds them into one people. The necessities of charity, and of the various requirements of education and of school life which the Education Department does not recognise, are supplied by the rich among the Jews.

But, even so, there are to-day unemployed among the Jewish community. There could be no fact more significant, as regards the conditions of labour.

A certain provision is made for giving breakfast to the needy, on condition that they present themselves half an hour before school-time. Bread and hot milk are served out at a counter, and the children eat, sitting in the large, covered shed. The proportion so relieved is very small—about one hundred and fifty out of three thousand odd; but, of course, it fluctuates. And this proportion represents only the children who have had no breakfast. A larger proportion are fed, but with bad food.

So are these flowers nurtured in the wilderness of the great town. The State builds expensive glasshouses in the wilderness, yet many of the

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flowers wither and die in the poisonous soil, and nearly all have some devitalising taint. How long shall we thus wickedly mortgage the heritage of our sons, and our sons' sons, for a little folding of the hands upon a proud stomach?

## XII

### THE REFUGE

UPON the evening of November 1st, the Providence (Row) Night Refuge, in Crispin Street, which adjoins Bishopsgate Street Without, opens its doors. Upon this first night of the season, men and women, with children, who had waited patiently for hours in the rain, fought to get in. Some hundred and forty men, a little over a hundred women, and fifteen children were admitted. Very many were perforce turned away.

Now, this particular Refuge has certain characteristics that distinguish it from others. Every one is admitted free, irrespective of creed. Every one must give an account of himself, or herself, which is taken down in writing, and each case is subjected to inquiry. About three out of five are, in practice, found to be true records. Should they be proved fallacious, the ticket which all receive, entitling them to five nights' board and lodging, is not renewed. In genuine

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cases the tickets are renewed, entitling the recipient to a further fifteen nights' lodging.

Upon their entrance, a bowl of cocoa and a small loaf are given to all. The people eat, sitting at the scrubbed deal tables in the clean, lofty rooms, which are warmed and pleasantly lighted. Then, they have their baths and go to bed. They sleep in great dormitories, in wooden bunks, raised about eighteen inches from the floor. The mattress and pillow are covered with American cloth ; the coverlet is a hide of leather. The whole place is kept absolutely clean. By means of the particulars obtained with regard to the circumstances of each person, differentiation is established, and the Sisters of Mercy are often able to get work for the women, while the secretary and manager, Mr. J. W. Gilbert, does what it is possible to do, in the present unorganised condition of the labour market, for the men. There are a school for girls and infants and a training establishment for girls who desire to be domestic servants, and a home for those who are waiting for a place. These establishments are also conducted by the Sisters.

From the economical point of view, it may, of course, be said that the Providence Night Refuge encourages the wastrel, in so far as it gives food and lodging to more persons than it



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can benefit permanently by setting them to earn a livelihood. On the other hand, it may be urged that such an institution does as much as any private enterprise can hope to do, in the absence of any State provision for dealing with surplus labour or with habitual idleness. It finds work where it can ; it gives the man and woman every opportunity and every encouragement to find work for themselves ; and, above all, it distinguishes one case from another, and conducts a careful and most laborious inquiry into its circumstances. It also enforces conditions which serve to eliminate to a large extent the kind of person who gives a bad name to the common lodging-house and to the casual ward. It does, in fact, very much what the casual ward was intended to do, and which it has lamentably failed to accomplish—it gives a man down on his luck another chance, without too much encouraging the professional idler.

Public recognition of the Providence Night Refuge has, so far, confined itself to an attempt, made by the London County Council, to register the place as a common lodging-house. An action was brought against it by the Council with the object of enforcing registration, which failed, with consequent loss of ill-spent public money.

Now, who and what are the people who take

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refuge here? Glance down the rows of seated, quiet figures in the men's room, and you shall see the familiar types, the familiar aspect of dull resignation. Here, are sturdy labourers, young men of twenty, grey-haired men of the clerkly kind, their clothes the respectable clerkly black, elderly nondescripts, the youngster who has grown out of his boy's job and boy's pay, to be sent upon the streets by his employer; ex-soldiers, of course; and a few indubitable wastrels, who will be sifted out very shortly. On the whole, the remarkable thing about this assembly is its respectability. Look down the half-dozen lines which make the written record of each case, and you shall see that the most of them are described as employed "on and off." They are, in fact, casual labourers, of whom there are so many in London to-day—the Reserve of Labour of the economist—that under no conceivable circumstances could they all be employed at once in full work. Here and there is the record of a skilled artisan, "discharged in time of slackness." Occasionally, "was in trouble."

But, with the men we have already made acquaintance, in the street, in the shelter, in the common lodging-house, and in the casual ward. Here, is but a variation of the individual, not of

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the type. But what of the women and the children? Cross the passage, and you shall see the bitterest sight in all broad England, the homeless woman and child.

Tables are set along the sides of the hall, and the women and children sit on either side of the tables. The black-robed Sisters who take the records of each person, who call the roll, and who superintend the serving of the meal, sit at small tables in the clear centre space. These are kind and wise women, of an unfaltering courage and devotion. (The society has just lost a Sister who, for forty-four years, gave herself to the care of the destitute.) Now, glance down the ranks of patient women, who are so tired that they do not care to talk one with another. Worn, lined faces are they all, near defeatured of all expression save that of endurance. Many are old, white-haired. They have the dignity of age, which is still the sign of an honest, hard-fought life. They are beaten at last, poor souls, but they are courageous still, and their colours are flying yet.

Here is an old lady, in decent bonnet and white shawl, sitting upright at the board, her hands folded. Her silver hair frames a face of ivory, carved into a majestic resignation. Do you think I exaggerate? Well, you can go and

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see, and form your own conclusions, any evening at six o'clock. Next her, is another aged toiler, her back bowed, her thick hair whitening. Opposite, is a bare-armed, middle-aged woman, half-sullen, half-defiant. Next her, a withered creature, worn to the bone, expressionless, huddled together in bits of indistinguishable clothing. Then, a young woman, in a sailor hat, a little jaunty still, despite her hopeless eyes.

The coughing of a child rises harshly upon the silence. He is a little, fair-haired, dark-eyed boy of three, twisting uneasily on the hard bench. He has a brother of four years old, also fair-haired and dark-eyed, a fine sturdy child, and a pallid sister of a little over twelve months, sitting on her mother's lap. The mother is a big, ruddy country woman. She came up from Cambridgeshire a little while ago, because her husband was dead, and some extremely silly person paid her fare to London, saying that there was more work there than in the country. Last night, she and her children went to a shelter, and paid for a bed and a meal. A shelter means, to a decent country person, indescribable dirt and smell, a herd of evil companions, a hell for the children. The night before, she found refuge upon the staircase of a tenement house. . . .

The little boy, who is buttoned to the throat

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in a thin jacket, coughs painfully. His head is hot, his pulse quick, his eyes large in his wan face. The mother says that the doctor diagnosed his cough as proceeding from the stomach—an opinion which seems to have consoled her in some indefinable way. It is, however, slowly dawning upon her that she has brought her country-bred children to slow and certain death among the streets.

The Sister in charge calls a white-faced girl of fourteen to her. The girl is neatly dressed, and her hair is carefully tended. She has been taught in the school day by day for seven years. Her only relative is her mother, and her mother is homeless. It is the plain fact that this child has never, since she was born, known a home. Her mother has either never been able to pay for the meanest permanent lodging, or she has preferred the nomadic life. Yet she cares for her child, and guards her, and tends her clothes. Neither mother nor daughter has any possession in the world which she does not carry upon her person. This quiet, pale child knows every shift and turn and hardship and villany of the streets. Only the Sisters saved her by day. Now she has finished her schooling, and her mother desires her to get work in a shop, in which she can earn a few shillings a week at once. That is,

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of course, to sacrifice her future. The Sisters are urging her to enter domestic service. "I'm not strong enough, sir," she says, hopelessly.

No wonder she thinks she is unable to cope with the kind of domestic service which she has seen. The women hereabout, her mother's acquaintances (some of whom are here to-night, utterly foredone), take service in the houses of the Children of Israel for sixpence a day. Out of this sum they must buy their own food. It is sometimes only fivepence. If they sleep in, their bed is the footboard of the dresser. If they sleep out with the children, for whose sake they go daily to be sweated to death, the corner of a friend's room, or the foul landing of a tenement-house staircase, out of the policeman's view, is their lodging. There is a case upon record in which an inspector found fourteen women and children upon one staircase. They cannot afford, you see, out of sixpence a day, to pay fourpence for a bed in a common lodging-house, or even twopence for a shelter—and then there are the children. I have said that the Jew was a good citizen, but there are qualifications to be considered with regard to that statement.

One chooses to relate these things in the baldest plain outline. For, if their mere recital does not serve to proclaim the indelible shame

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and unforgivable wickedness of the wrong done to helpless children every day, every hour, in the dark places of the great towns, and the peril of the accumulating black debt which our sons and our sons' sons will assuredly have to pay to the last farthing, then it would avail nothing were the truth to be heralded by the trumpet of the Archangel, and written across the whole vault of heaven.

Whose is the fault, and whose the responsibility? Those are questions which each must answer for himself. The good people of the Providence Night Refuge have answered it. That is why I have taken you there.

### XIII

## THE SENTIMENTS OF THE S.D.F.

THE S.D.F.—the initials stand for Social Democratic Federation—is a perfectly well-known body, with its own leaders and its own literature and its own influence. It is a red spot of living opinion amid a vast, grey mass of apathy. Its creed may be described as embracing the extreme forms of collectivism. It represents an heroic attempt to solve the immemorial problem, somewhere stated by Carlyle—given a world of knaves, to invent a system that will turn out honest men. Above all, the S.D.F. is the champion of those whom it considers—rightly or wrongly—to be the oppressed and the wronged of society ; such, for instance, as the unemployed. Many Social Democrats are themselves unemployed at this moment, and that is why their point of view is especially pertinent to the matter in hand. For the principles of the S.D.F. make a vital force, acting in all sorts of unexpected ways upon all manner of persons.



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That force is one of the factors which must be taken into account, not only by reason of its abstract potentialities but, because the persons who exercise it are themselves worth consideration.

You can, of course, hear as much social democracy as you like, if you choose to attend an S.D.F. meeting. The stuff talked there might or might not be interesting—the speakers would undoubtedly be worth your study. But you would conceive them, under these circumstances, as an isolated body, whose members might be highly agreeable to each other, but who would be wholly disregarded by persons who did not share their opinions.

Suppose, however, a meeting of highly respectable artisans, labourers, small tradesmen, and their wives, shop assistants and boys employed in factory work, convened by the Church for avowedly Christian purposes, the Vicar in the chair. Suppose, further, a lecturer discoursing with great knowledge and insight upon the economic aspect of the Problem of the Unemployed, setting forth its chief conditions, and pointing to certain methods which might lead, at least, to a partial solution. Would you expect to find the Social Democrat, not only present but, welcome upon such an occasion? Whether or

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no, that is the kind of meeting which is being unobtrusively held, as a matter of course, in the East to-day.

The lecture was heard with close attention, and in silence. At the end, discussion was invited. Then up rose a large-headed, shaggy man, with a square forehead overhanging deep-set eyes. He stood awkwardly leaning forward, his hands on the desk in front of him, his great head sunk in his shoulders. This man is a member of the S.D.F. He is unemployed, inasmuch as his whole property in this world consists of one barrow, and he is wholly uncertain if he will make much or little, or anything, to-day or to-morrow.

He begins to speak, low at first, with a crooked smile; and at once you are aware that this man was born a natural orator.

"Mr. Chairman and Lecturer,—I have received a caution to-night, on entering the hall, from my friend here. He said he hoped I would behave like a gentleman, and not make any unseemly disturbance. I must remember that caution. I will try, though not one, to be a gentleman to-night."

The smile dies out of his face, the eyebrows draw down over the dark eyes, the whole man is evidently charged with sincere emotion. He

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began to question the lecturer, acutely enough. The point was whether, under an intelligent system of labour exchanges, the conditions under which the casual labourer worked could not be made more stable. If the surplusage of labour here could be drafted at once to the deficiency there, the theory put forward was that a definite number of the whole could be always kept in work, and that the balance, being clearly separated out, might be disposed of in another way.

“But supposing,” said the S.D.F. man, “that the whole body of men working under one employer consider themselves to have a legitimate grievance, in consequence of a flagrant injustice, considered to be such, and ratified by the whole trade to which these men belong—too long hours, or too little wages—what, I would ask the lecturer, is to prevent the said employer from sacking the 'ole of the men, and sending to the labour exchange to replace them at any rate he chooses to pay? The men upon the lists of the exchange will have to accept any terms. They, at a distance, would be ignorant of the question at issue. The employer, being actuated by one sole and only motive, that of making money, will continue to commit his injustice, and his former employees will remain out of work.”

The lecturer put forward a suggestion which,

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he thought, might meet the case. When there was any question of a trade dispute, the fact would be notified.

The S.D.F. orator dropped that point. Hunching himself closer together, and grasping the breast of his faded overcoat with both hands, he paused. Outside, in the dark lane leading to the schoolroom, children were screaming like parrots, "This way for the unemployed! All unemployed admitted 'ere!"

"I do not forget," the orator went on, "that, as the Reverend Chairman has told us, we are here met together not for debate but for friendly discussion, with a view to us each learning something. With the chairman's permission, friends, I should like to put a case. . . ." There was a murmur of assent. Every eye turned upon the pale head with its deep-set eyes and shock of dusty hair, relieved upon the dull red of the wall, under the flaring gas.

"Every one in the nation must wear boots, even the poorest, to keep their feet from the bitter ground. Say, there is a factory which makes boots. Say, the factory employs a hundred hands, and that each hand makes three pairs of boots a day—no, say fifty hands, that's easier. Fifty hands and one hundred and fifty pairs a day. Now the employer, whom we will call Mr.

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Brown——” The speaker paused, wrinkled his brows, and, with that twisted smile of his, suddenly relaxing his whole attitude, he said, “There—I see I’m at my old tricks again, with my employer this and employer that—I’m forgetting my caution. But pardon me, friends, for a few moments. I’ll try to be a gentleman.” It was a studied piece of acting, well enough done. How in the world did this person with a barrow learn it?

“The employer, Mr. Brown, being solely actuated—as the lecturer has told us—by the motive of piling up enough money to support his son in utter idleness, which, if I understood the lecturer rightly, was also to be a benefit to the State, introduces a piece of labour-saving machinery. Some clever inventor comes along with a machine what will enable one man to do the work of five. Consequently, Mr. Brown—having no eye but for his money, which is to keep his son idle for the good of the State—Mr. Brown, he sacks forty men. Mark, now, friends, what happens—and it happens every day. That is why we are deeply interested in this question—*because it’s us*. There’s forty men out of a job. They are not wanted. They are not everybody’s penny any more. They have no money to pay their union fees, and so they drops out of their union. Meanwhile, our

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friend, Mr. Brown, the employer, he says to the ten men what is left—always with the sole motive of making money—Mr. Brown says, ‘I can’t afford to pay you such high wages. I shall reduce them. If you don’t like it,’ he says, ‘you can go. There’s plenty will take your place.’ For the forty men what’s dismissed, friends, they are forced by hunger, and by the necessity of keeping their wives and little children, to take any wage what’s offered.”

Pause. Breathing silence. The speaker’s tufted eyebrows lift, and shut down again.

“Therefore, I say, friends, the rich and wealthy classes are profiting by the starvation and want of the poor. The very boots they wear are stained with blood.”

The orator sat down. There was applause. To the men and women present who worked with their hands, and who knew the clutch of want, the dread of destitution, there was no flaw in the argument. Indeed, the S.D.F. man had but told a plain tale of familiar fact.

Then rose a burly, square-shouldered, ruddy man, and spoke in a loud voice straight on. He was an ex-inspector of police. He was forty-six. He had his pension. He was a teetotalter, and—he begged to be allowed to say—a Christian man. He was also one of the unemployed.

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Why? Although he had his pension, he considered himself entitled to apply for a job. He had applied for many—he, fit to lift four hundred-weight, a man in the prime of life, of unimpeachable integrity—and was always refused. Why, again? Because he was forty-six. “And I come home, and I says to my dear wife, ‘Why, missis, if we hadn’t a pension, whatever in this world should we do?’” And if such a man could get no work, what chance had the rest? That was the inference. It was undeniable.

The next speaker was a pale, grey-bearded man in glasses. He was a skilled mechanic, working at the bench, and, thank God, he was not out of work. And he was a keen Trade Unionist. But what, he desired to know, was the use of unions to the unemployed? How could they pay their subscriptions? They could not, and so dropped out. And the moment a margin was created of outside men willing to work at any wage, of what earthly use was your union? Quite so. Every one agreed upon that point, also.

Now these three men bore the evident impress of sincerity. Not only did they mean what they said, but what they said was true. I omit the sentiments of the fourth speaker, who was the ordinary agitator with a taste for the game. The

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remarkable and significant thing is, that the audience, respectable, church-going, earnest—undoubtedly earnest—should gravely and sympathetically agree. Nor had the chairman, or the lecturer, or any one of the three or four clergymen in the room, a word of dissent.

East of Aldgate you will everywhere find the same serious agreement upon that one crucial point—the pitiless, inevitable destruction of the poor by the vast, blind engine of commercial industry.

The S.D.F. man went out, surrounded by friends, and talking busily. It seemed that he was known, respected, and liked. So his great pale head, with the overhanging brows, passed out of the gas-light of that pathetically cheerless schoolroom into the dark byways, and was gone.

The picture of the streets makes a fitting pendant to the posture of affairs outlined in a single instance, out of hundreds daily occurring, by the S.D.F. man. If so many thousands of able men and willing are being thrust out as wastage by the great blind machine, there must be evidences of the result. Here they are, not only hidden in dark corners—and what a deadly tale is there, too!—but open and palpable in the broad, lighted streets. Men in twos and threes are drifting by, or standing at the corners; women, a shawl swathing their rags, stand about in the bitter



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wind, often with infants in their arms. You may see them in the main thoroughfares of the East, still pacing, sheltering the child as best they may, at all hours from dusk to dawn. Children, wrapped in any clothing that will hang upon them, play together in the kennel. Children will always play—cold, hungry, indescribably dirty and weary—still they play.

A boy, in an old black coat reaching below his knees, the sleeves rolled up on thin arms, trousers hanging in fringes between knee and ankle, runs barefooted beside the tram, swiftly turning Catherine-wheels in the mud. His skin shows dead-white in the misty gleam of the lamps. So he flings himself head over heels with an incredible endurance, running and begging for coppers. A trained athlete, nourished upon an ample diet, could have done no more.

From the skilled workman, vainly ranging the town for work and still denied, and still sinking to ultimate incapacity, the mind traces cause and effect down to this white-faced, starveling boy (think of the jolly youngsters at the expensive preparatory schools), flinging himself through the dark for coppers—presently flinging himself right out of life. And so much the better, poor little wretch. There's one the less, of an Imperial people.

## XIV

### THE FOUR POINTS OF INDUSTRY

THE hall was filled with respectable artisans, labourers, Jew tailors, socialists, boys of twenty or so who looked as though they would be none the worse for a steady job, here and there a wife or a sister of one of these, and a few wastrels, the whole array of grave, attentive faces veiled in a haze of tobacco smoke. They had met together to hear a lecture and to take part in a discussion upon the present distress. East of Aldgate Pump, the inhabitants own an insatiable appetite for talking about their grievances; and small blame to them. But, if they came together that evening with the expectation of luxuriating in the usual vague and inconclusive generalities of Socialism, they were disappointed, for the lecturer had another design. He came rather to accuse than to condole. In a word, this long, lean person in gold eye-glasses, with the sharp nose and pointed head, formulated a series of questions which every intelligent person is asking

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himself, doubtfully, yet with a certain sense of injury, to-day. They might be called the Four Points of Industry. The lecturer had it in mind to elicit, if possible, a definite answer from these representatives of that notorious creature, the British working man.

He began, did this bold lecturer, by asserting, as a basic principle, that, if one class of the community had aught to demand from the other classes, that class must make good its claim to having fulfilled its duties as a class. For instance, if, what is called, the working class demanded from the other classes more pay, or less work, that class must be able to show a solid record of honest industry. (Signs of restlessness among the audience, suppressed by the chairman.) Having regard to this principle, the lecturer went on to affirm that, with respect to four points in the conduct of their life by the working classes, the other classes of the community held certain opinions which were either founded on fact, or which were mistaken. The lecturer begged his audience to inform him if, in their view, the said opinions were justified, and, if so, what was the cause of this condition of affairs. (Profound attention on the part of the audience.)

The first point, then, the lecturer continued, had to do with Quality of Workmanship. The

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second, with the Nurture of Children. The third, with the Use or Misuse of Civic Powers. The fourth, with National Defence.

With regard to the first point, the lecturer, in quite unmistakable (if slightly nasal) accents, had to inform his hearers that the reputation of the British workman, in respect of honesty and of goodness of workmanship, was distinctly bad. Astonishment held his audience mute, and the chairman's table was speedily littered with scraps of paper inscribed with the names of gentlemen desiring to reply. Premising that it was always hazardous to argue from the particular to the general, the lecturer went on to recount instances which had fallen under his own observation. A friend of his own, who had his house under repair, went thither one evening after the workmen had gone. The place was as full of gas as a balloon. He threw open the windows, traced the leakage to a spot in the floor, prized up a board, lit a match, and was immediately knocked head over heels by the explosion. (Voice in the corner: "Serve the — right!"—speaker indignantly suppressed.) What was the cause? The plumber had laid a gas-pipe along the top of a joist, and the carpenter had driven his nails through the board and through the gas-pipe. A few days later, the same employer of British labour arrived

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in the dusk to find water trickling under the front door down the steps. Wading up the river upstairs to its source, he found that the bath-taps had been left running—by the plumber. Another friend, an engineer, had a job in the country, which he was bound under a heavy penalty to complete to time. He went down to inspect it, and found the works utterly deserted. The men were playing a cricket match with the village team. He called the foreman, who wept, repented, spoke of his wife and children (Voice from audience: “’E was caught out!”) and begged for another chance. It was given him, under effusive promises of amendment. The master then went to catch his train, which he missed. He returned to the job. Again, not a man on it—all engaged in finishing the interrupted match. (Here a lady interposed a remark to the effect that the lecturer “seemed unfortunate in his friends.”) But, the lecturer had no desire to present one side of the case. He had known workmen who were as good as could be, and he gave an instance of pluck, enterprise, and excellent craftsmanship. (“What I want to know,” said the gentleman in the corner, “is, if he was paid time-and-a-half for the job?”) The lecturer concluded this section of his discourse, by remarking that the suicidal policy of the Trade Unions led them to make ability to pay

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the condition of membership, rather than the ability to do good work ; so that, so soon as a man lost his job, and failed to contribute his subscription, his Union became of no use to him.

Second point. With regard to the nurture of their children, the lecturer appealed to his audience to inform him if it was not the fact that children were fed upon unwholesome scraps of fish, inferior bread, cheese, pickles, and so forth, instead of upon pure milk and plenty of it ; that, meanwhile their fathers spent some twenty-five per cent of their wages on bad beer ; and that no effort was made to apprentice the children to a trade, so that, when juvenile wages for unskilled labour ceased, they fell to casual labour. (Some commotion at this juncture.)

Third point. The lecturer expressed his amazement at the almost entire neglect by the working classes of their civic rights. While they clamoured about their grievances, they continued to send men to Parliament—of whatever party—who, as they perfectly well knew by experience, would do nothing for them. With this immense power of democracy in their hands, they allowed (for instance) the Factory Acts to go unamended, the housing problem to go unsolved, the sanitary enactments to remain but half enforced, and a world of consequent suffering to continue.

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Fourth point. With regard to the matter of national defence, the lecturer pointed out that, in case of war, the working classes, who lived from hand to mouth, would be the first to suffer. He went on to quote the familiar facts relating to the importation of food and of raw material, to dispose of the impossibility-of-invasion fallacy, and to point out the danger of the loss of India, if the Regular Army had no national Reserve behind it.

In conclusion, the lecturer had to express his surprise at the studied avoidance of such topics as these in the Labour newspapers and speeches. The workman was ever fabricating systems to improve his condition, oblivious of the fact that he had first to prove himself fit for the position he already had. The speaker sat down amid tumult, lit a cigarette, and placidly awaited the onset.

Then, there came swiftly to the platform a pale, fervid person, with a fierce right hand, that continually cleft the air.

Why, he desired passionately to know, did the workman live from hand to mouth? Because his employer paid him starvation wages. And why should he take arms to defend his country, when he had no country—when he was the producer, and every one else the consumer? So much for national defence. As for India, let it go, and the sooner the better, as the nursing-ground of the

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aristocrat, and the prey of the capitalist. With regard to civic duties, it was the speaker's opinion that the apathy in respect of them was due to ignorance. To ignorance, and to jealousy among Labour leaders. The orator here gave pointed instances, which were extremely ill-received by partisans of another section among the audience. With regard to food—the feeding of children was a disgrace. He admitted it. But, whose was the fault? Why, the employer's, who paid low wages. As to bad workmanship, the speaker accused the "able lecturer" of libel; and immediately went on to admit a custom of unsound workmanship, which was again due wholly to insufficient wages.

The next speaker confirmed this statement, and made the desperate assertion that all workmen, provided that they were well paid, would be competent. With regard to the decay of the apprentice system, it was due to the failure of masters to teach apprentices. They were sweated during their time, and then kicked out. This speaker also denied that he had a country. Invasion, he considered, would be in the nature of a general blessing to the oppressed.

These two men were in fiery earnest. They meant what they said. But, now uprose a smooth, fallacious gentleman, an old and practised debater, skilled in the false inference, the side issue, the



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cheap epigram, the inapposite quotation, dear to the platform orator. To consider his fluent observations was to perceive the reason why debates, as such, are the most futile exercises in the world.

He was succeeded by a quiet, dark, sad person, who showed very clearly and rightly how labour is constantly being displaced by new inventions in machinery. He made no attempt to reply to the lecturer. He stated his facts and retired.

Then, came an eager Jew. He admitted every conclusion of the lecturer; but he assigned the cause of bad work, to scanty pay, and the reason why men drank, to their desire to drown sorrow. As for India, he had served in India himself—and of what good was India to the soldier? He got fever, came home, and was put upon the streets. Let India go—the sooner the better (immense applause).

The chairman having risen to explain that owing to the necessity of closing the meeting at a certain hour, there would be no time for more speeches, the lecturer rose again to make his reply to criticism, when the gentleman in the corner was understood to remark that he wasn't allowed to speak because they were afraid of him.

"Let him come," said the lecturer, and sat down again.

Then, amid tumult, there ascended to the

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platform a squat, red-faced, black-haired man, with a large nose, a moist eye, and a delighted grin.

“Now, ladies and gentlemen—all right, Mr. Chairman, I won’t keep you two minutes, I promise I won’t, straight—now, friends, the able lecturer has been talking on what he calls some elements of distress. *I’ll* tell you an element of distress. *I’ll* tell you a little story—I promise it shan’t be long. Now, one of our friends what has spoken, somewhat ‘eatedly (shouts), if I may say so (more shouting), is a tailor. *I’m* a tailor. I know what’s what. I know what’s the cause of prices fallin’. It’s this way. (Cries of ‘Time!’ The orator wholly unabashed.) A master tailor employs a cutter. To that cutter he pays thirty-five shillings a week. Thir-ty-five shillings, if you’ll believe me. One day there comes to the master tailor a stranger, what has recently arrived upon our shores. (Tumult, suppressed with difficulty.) ‘Sir,’ says he, ‘‘ave you a job for me?’ ‘What can you do?’ says the master. ‘Sir,’ says the stranger, ‘I am a cutter. Fine cutter, too. I come for tvelf shillingsh a week.’ The master, he says to himself, ‘What!’ he says, ‘and I’m a-paying my cutter thir-ty-five shillings, and if I employ this stranger I shall save twen-ty-three shillings a week.’ ‘Are you a good cutter?’ says he.

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‘Zesh, sir,’ says the stranger. ‘I am very good cutter. - On tvelf shillingsh a week. And I haf tvelf shildren!’ (More tumult—protest from scandalised chairman.) All right, Mr. Chairman—two minutes—one-and-a-half—I promise. Well, friends, the master he says, ‘All right. Come on Monday,’ says he. ‘Zhank you, sir,’ says the stranger. Then the master, he sends for his cutter. ‘Look here,’ he says, ‘I shan’t want you next Monday, cocky.’ (Voice of a lady from the audience, ‘Shame!’ ‘Right you are, Sarah, it *was* a shame!’ replies the orator. He rubs his hands, grins, winks, his whole face shines, and he goes on.) ‘I shan’t want you next Monday, cocky,’ says the master. ‘How’s that, guv’nor? Anything wrong?’ ‘Why, no—a bit slack, d’ye see, mate? You might stand off for a week, see?’ ‘Shall I come round the week after, guv’nor?’ ‘Why, yes, you might come round—come round, yes, you might do that, of course. Well, so-long, cocky!’ So he goes, does the cutter, and a Jew (increasing tumult) a Jew, on tvelf shillingsh a week, friends, with tvelf shildren, so help him, gets the job of a decent Englishman. (Riot. When it began to subside, the orator came to his peroration.) And what does our Jew do for himself and his tvelf shildren on tvelf shillingsh a week? Why, he goes to Spitalfields Market, of which you may

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have 'eard (shouts), and he picks up the dirty cabbage leaves what we Englishmen feeds our rabbits on, and he takes 'em home, and he makes sauerkraut of 'em—sauerkraut, that's what he lives on. And we know this story's true, 'cause it's happening every day, friends." (Immense tumult, during which the orator bows, waves his hands, smiles, and retires.)

It was now the turn of the lecturer to reply. He merely pointed out that his tentative conclusions had been practically confirmed by every speaker, expressed his gratitude for the enlightenment he had received, and affirmed the principle which had been consistently enunciated, of associating the quality of work directly with the money received for it, to be the principle most disastrous to industry which could possibly be advocated.

Now, these opinions of what is called the British working man are highly significant and worthy of consideration. They are perfectly genuine and very widely prevalent. That there is many a man who deserves retribution for his former conduct, is indubitable. But, his wife and children ought not, therefore, to starve. And before we can in any wise deal with our unemployed workman, as distinguished from the chronically lazy and the wastrel, or tramp, we

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must first make sure there is work for him to do ;  
and secondly, determine that (despite the British  
Constitution) a certain discipline shall be estab-  
lished.

## XV

### FUEL OF FIRE

**I**T must not be forgotten for a moment that the unnumbered legion of the unemployed includes, besides the honest workman, very many who will not work, and very many who cannot. It is merely impossible to estimate the numbers of the whole and to classify the various types into numbered categories, because the machinery for doing so does not exist. No statistics, for instance, take into account the thousands of casual labourers, waterside men and the like, who are in work one day, and out of it the next. They are both employed and unemployed at the same time. The Trade Union statistics ignore the large number of men who have dropped out of the Unions so soon as they lost their job, and consequently became unable to pay their subscription. It is for this very reason that the Trade Union system fails ; for, so soon as a man has most need of its support, he is deprived of it. The system must continue to fail so long as the qualification for membership is purely monetary.

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Indeed, the whole mass of the unemployed may be figured in the shape of a pyramid, built up of various strata, which are in continual process of movement, one stratum melting into another, with a general downward tendency. At the apex, are the honest workmen, bereft of work by forces outside their control ; below them, the less competent, who are the first to be discharged in times of depression ; then the men, fairly good fellows, who are simply incapable of working save under compulsion, and who, under compulsion, are capable of excellent service. Among these, are ex-soldiers, of whom it is estimated that there are a thousand living in casual wards and the like, in London alone ; merchant seamen, chiefly firemen, idlers, or with a bad mark upon their discharge certificate ; an indiscriminate assemblage, chiefly composed of labourers ; and men who have made a fatal slip and who have never recovered from it. Below these, are the professional tramps and vagrants, the pariah dogs of civilisation, who have brought the art of living without work to a science. And below these, shading into them, are the habitual criminals, a great and formidable brigade, which is just, and only just, kept within bounds by the constant vigilance, sagacity, and courage of the police, whom they far outnumber.

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This dreadful incubus is perpetually upborne upon the shoulders of the middle classes. They pay for all. The burden does not oppress the wealthy; but, beneath its increasing weight and mass the middle classes are perceptibly failing. They can, for instance, no longer afford large families. They are closed in and depleted and hampered on every side. And as more and yet more material is piled upon the apex, the base of the pyramid widens. The honest workman thrown out of work, swiftly deteriorates, and declines to the stratum of the incompetent, and melts through that, into the stratum of men who have lost will-power, and so down towards the irredeemable at the bottom. As he descends, the element of danger to the State--active, vital danger--intensifies, as a heart of fire in a pile of damp fuel gradually smoulders into an inextinguishable conflagration.

At present, the glow is within. The outside, seared, and blotched and deformed as it is, still coheres in a sham stability. Yet, the sullen flame, flickering here and there, cannot be wholly hid. Let the observer traverse the streets, by day or by night, but especially by night, and consider the signification of what he sees.

It is eleven o'clock of a Saturday night. The long street of begrimed and low-browed houses,



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running parallel with the river, glows here and there with lighted shop-windows, between dead spaces of blinded fronts and tall warehouses. At the corner, where a by-street plunges into obscurity, heading towards the unseen river, a little crowd is collected about the door of a marine-store dealer. A yellow-faced, black-whiskered Jew dealer is peering round the angle of his shop door, down the by-street, whence there comes the dying noise of running footsteps. A tall policeman, imperturbable as a statue, stands near, with an elaborate affectation of looking at nothing in particular. A yard or two nearer the white-faced little group of gazers, another policeman is also gazing meditatively into vacancy. The whole scene is stamped momentarily upon the senses—the black-whiskered Jew, peering round the door and convulsively jerking back, his hands opening and shutting, the clatter of fleeing footsteps in the dark, the whispering, pallid crowd, the two towering figures of the unmoved and immovable constables.

“Did I,” says the policeman who stands sideways towards the Jew, slightly turning his head, “did I hear you call a policeman?”

The marine-store dealer starts violently, withdraws a step, comes out again, peers again into the dark, and protests with appealing hands.

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"Did I, or did I not, hear you say 'policeman'?" the inexorable figure repeats, with a sort of menacing conversational calm.

"Oh, sir! Yes, sir!" the Jew jerks, like a man on wires. "I did, sir. But it's all right now. Oh, all right now, constable."

"Ah!" says Justice. "That's well. I thought, you know, hearing a call, you might have been assaulted in your shop, or something of that. Some one in there, wasn't that it?"

The dealer, who is obviously terrified to distraction lest the policeman should offer to enter his shop, begins a voluble explanation. But, the policeman cuts him short, still without looking at him, as one who, knowing all, could afford to rest his eyes.

"You say it's all right. Very well. All right it is.—Hadn't you better go in?"

The Jew vanishes with the speed of a harlequin. The white, watching faces melt away. The two statuesque figures remain, absolute, predominant.

And what, after all, you say, of this? Why, it may mean very little, or it may mean a good deal, in this region. For, close by, are streets into which even the policeman does not care to go alone; in which the casual labourer, ever under the stress of want, dwells cheek by jowl with the

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waterside thief and the men who are handy with knives ; in which Fo'c'sle Jack, coming ashore, is pinned against a wall and plundered of all he has. It was hereabout that, the other day, an old seaman, who had been fifty years at sea, was robbed in the open street of twenty pounds, which was all he had in the world. He is now in the workhouse. A marine-store dealer in these parts, who dreads the entrance of a policeman, has very good cause for his terror. For this is the haunt of the crimp, and the seamen's boarding-house keeper, and the whole tribe of those who prey upon the sailor.

And what, again, have these things to do with the problem of unemployment? Much. For the problem of unemployment is, to be exact, a problem of organisation, of government, and of the enforcement of discipline. These people are all part of the pyramid. What of the sailor's wife and children when the sailor comes home robbed of his wages? How many sailors' wives are driven upon the streets—even the wives of Navy men? I have known that to happen. What of the working man who is led, by the chance of temporary work, to settle in this quarter? Presently the work is done. Then begins the inevitable decline.

Come westward. It is nearing midnight, yet

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there are children, who have hardly yet learned to walk, crowding the pavement, sitting heaped together in doorways, clinging to loud-voiced, slatternly mothers. As the shops are left behind, the street is near deserted, save for white faces that glimmer in the shadow of recesses, and for a huge, drunken woman, who is singing and shouting her way home. But, the public-houses are full to the street doors. Every glass drunk within them, means so much less food for the children, waiting on the doorstep of their home for their parents' return. They are already under the bitter training which shall fit them exactly to replace their progenitors.

Further west, the Jews prevail. Sabbath is over, and the Jewesses fill the street, resplendent in exotic finery, purchased by a week's incessant toil. We are more concerned with the strange, huddled figures of Gentile women, crouched upon the warehouse steps, knee to chin. These are the night-wanderers, for whom there is no room in the refuges to-night. One or two are picking over and devouring the scraps which they have gathered during the day, and which are wrapped together in newspaper. There is a street, on the frontier of East and West, in which you may see them at any hour of the day or night. But, at night, they thicken like spectres; crouching in

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doorways, drooping upon the stone plinth of the rails that close in the dark churchyard, or patrolling the pavement, scouting for their prey, up and down, up and down, in and out among the smart young Jews and Jewesses, with ever a wary eye for the policeman.

There is one among those blotched, deplorable night-birds of prey, to-night, who has been drinking, or who is faint. She has collapsed upon the kerb, and sits in the kennel, trying to rise. Jew and Gentile as they passed her shouted foul gibes. Not one put forth a hand. It was a woman like herself who helped her to her feet and led her away.

A little further on, another night-bird is propped against the wall, close beside the doorway of a philanthropic settlement. The walls of that home of light and sweet reason are echoing with the obscenities she hurls at the procession of the respectably attired, coming home from theatre and music-hall. The most of these are young men and women, both Jew and Gentile, of the artisan and factory class; and the most, whether Jew or Gentile, man or maiden, retort in terms as vile, or viler. Consider now this spectacle for a moment. It is a direct consequence of poverty, and of the conditions under which poverty breeds vice that spreads and festers.

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This is the kind of temper that results; and if that be not a canker in the State, a most virulent poison, I know not what is. Consider, also, the end of this little incident—and you may see the same thing upon any night you care to choose. A decently clad young artisan turned and spat in the face of the poor, babbling creature, propped against the wall. So far as I know that youth is still allowed to live, and to enjoy the respect of the thousands who are like him. . . .

There was once a man who stole fire from heaven. We have done another thing. We have heaped up fuel of fire and borrowed the kindling from hell.

## XVI

### THE CASUAL WARD

YOU are not to suppose that the casual ward which I describe is entirely typical of the class of such institutions. I have selected what is, perhaps, the best in London. It is known among its regular patrons as the Hôtel Métropole of casual wards. You may, therefore, safely argue from an instance that shows the best that can be made of the thing, which is still an example of a vicious system, to the worst, which is intolerable, and which is sufficiently described by Mrs. Higgs ("Viatrix") in a paper reprinted from the "Contemporary Review" of May, 1904, called "The Tramp Ward."

It is four o'clock in the afternoon, when a uniformed official opens the door of the casual ward, and whistles. Three old women enter, and the door is shut. The manager sits within a glass office, and the applicants come one by one to the open pane in front of him. He enters their names, ages, last place in which they slept,

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and place of birth, in a ledger, takes charge of any money, pipes, and tobacco they may have, assigns them the number of their bed, and dismisses them to the woman official. They are conducted to a clean, bare room, set with deal tables and forms, and a pannikin of oatmeal gruel is set before them, together with a hunch of bread. The gruel in this establishment is good stuff, thick and creamy. When they have finished it they are conducted to the anteroom to the bath-room, in which are a row of basins and two excellent baths. Two have a bath at a time, under the supervision of the female officer. Each is given a clean nightgown, and three rugs. They then go to the dormitory, a long, bare room, with cross-ventilation, heated by a hot-water pipe that is fixed a foot from the floor and about six feet from the walls. Canvas hammocks are stretched between iron rails in a double row round the ward, at right angles to the walls. The hot-water pipe thus passes beneath them, near the foot.

The women make their beds, one rug below, two above. Meanwhile, more women are dropping in, to go through precisely the same routine. They are quiet, respectable creatures on the whole. Most of them are elderly. Some are very old ladies, dim and helpless creatures.

By this time, the men are being admitted in



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batches of six or so. Each man is made to take off his coat as he enters. "Better get behind the partition, when their coats are coming off," says the manager, with considerate forethought. "You see, the coats get shaken in being removed, and . . ." Quite so.

But, if you suppose the casual ward regiment to be comparable with the shelter and common lodging-house patrons, you err. The first man who enters is a powerful, handsome man of thirty-five or so, straight as a lance, the thews and sinews of an athlete expressing themselves even through his loose, rough clothing.

"What regiment were you in?" says the manager, sharply.

"East Kent, sir," the man replies, automatically, with a salute.

"Unemployable? Don't tell *me*," says the manager, as the ex-soldier goes down to his gruel. "I'll wager that man's upper arm measures fifteen inches in circumference. What is it? Laziness. Nothing else. Born lazy."

A ruddy, white-haired head is framed in the window, its naturally jovial expression elaborately subdued to a stage melancholy.

"Age?" "Sixty-two." "Trade?" "Draper's assistant." "How long out of employment?" asks the manager, conversationally, as he writes

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in his book. "Fifty-one years," says the old gentleman, taken off his guard. "Then you left the drapery at eleven years old?" observed the manager, gazing into the mobile red face, which grins and twinkles at him. "Well, leastways, my father was something in that line," says he. "Number thirteen—away with you," says the manager. "Next?"

A sturdy, brown-faced fellow says he is a labourer, aged thirty-two. A hairy man of forty-five is also a labourer. A little man of forty, his chin level with the desk, says he is a brass-fitter. Two more strong, good-looking, time-expired soldiers, and another grey-headed labourer, and so on.

Name, age, trade, last place slept at, all duly registered. "Ever been here before?" "Never." "Of course not." The law ordains that no man shall use any casual ward in the metropolitan area more than twice in the same month, under penalty of being detained for four days. The penalty is, however, made of none effect by a clause which provides that a man may be released if he says he is going to look for work. Moreover, there is no means of identification, except the word of the official. Although, by a remarkable coincidence, not one of the men had visited the place during the past two years

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(at least), and the most had never been there before, according to their stolid and immovable assertion, it was singular how many interchanged the glance of old acquaintance with the manager. Curious to remark, also, that none of the men bore the traces of severe want, or lack of food. They were sturdy, fresh-complexioned creatures on the whole, with little enough of the unspeakable, hopeless degeneration of the shelter and the common lodging-house men.

The manager of the ward estimates the average number of old soldiers among them at fifty-six per cent of the whole. The Charity Organisation Society estimated in 1891, that at least one-fifth of the destitute were old soldiers, as a result of the short-service system. The men are drawn from the shiftless, loafing class, and to it they return. Compare with these figures the fact that an ex-naval man is hardly known in the casual ward; although, under the pernicious short-service system which the Admiralty are encouraging, it is very probable that the Navy man will presently join his comrade, after leaving the service by no means better than he found it.

The men follow the same routine as the women—supper, bath, clean nightshirt, hammock bed. By five in the morning, they are at work. A section is set to scrubbing floors, passages, and

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stairs; another to painting and small repairs, if there are men who fail to conceal their skill in these respects; another (in this case) to pick oakum. In other establishments, there is the savage stone-breaking. The distribution and the kind of work enforced depend upon the caprice of the guardians; so that the system, such as it is, has not even the quality of uniformity.

Downstairs, the men who are picking oakum sit on forms ranged against the wall, each with his little bundle of rope-ends beside him, and the tan-coloured pile of oakum rising very slowly between his knees. They are talking together in low tones, as they untwist and fray out the tarred, stubborn yarns. So they sit all day, strong fellows, fit for good service, condemned to useless, painful labour which profits nothing.

"How many are old soldiers? Hands up! Don't be afraid, men, there's nothing in it."

Nine hands. "How many Militia?" Two. There are twenty-three men in the room, and eleven of them are ex-soldiers. Look at this roomful of lazy, misused, sturdy fellows, picking bits of old rope to pieces for the price of a night's lodging. What is one to think—what can any sane person think—of a country which so deals with its power of manhood?

Consider, also, the original purpose of the

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system of the casual ward, together with its actual effect. Its purpose was, to provide a night's board and lodging, in a time when the population was much less concentrated in towns than it is now, to the honest workman travelling in search of work.

In order to discourage the vagrant, a penalty of disagreeable and useless work was instituted. Mark now the result. The lowest class of vagrant was, in truth, discouraged; and, lest he should be inconvenienced, free shelters, or partly free, were established by private philanthropy, by the Salvation Army, and by the Church Army. At the same time, the sturdy, lazy man, who was fit enough for work, found that, by means of a compromise, he could get an agreeable living enough. What he could pick up during the day he would spend on food, drink, and clothing, being sure, at the price of labour, which did not much annoy him, of free food and clean shelter at night. So these men gradually drew together in a class apart—the casual ward regiment, lodged by the State at night, and let loose during the day to prey upon society at large. They esteem themselves above the shelter and lodging-house contingent, who also have created and propagated a vast army of the useless, also lodged at night, and also prowling in the day.

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Admit that a few are reclaimed by the Salvation and Church Armies ; the many remain—verminous, degenerate, unmoral, utterly decivilised.

And where, if you please, is the honest workman, for whose benefit this remarkable institution was established ? Wherever he is, he is not, and he never will be, in the casual ward. He esteems himself, and justly, above the lazy regiment. He does not choose to be associated with them ; and, if he did, it is odds but he would very soon fall into the ranks.

Observe. There is no machinery established for differentiation. There is no provision whatever for finding a man work. There are the gruel, the bath, the hammock, the oakum, and the stones. What a catalogue !

And the most enlightened Board of Guardians can do no more than palliate the evils of one of the most injurious systems which even a British Government has succeeded in devising.

## XVII

### THE WORKHOUSE AND THE INFIRMARY

THE institution of the workhouse is intimately related to the problem of the want of employment, both as exemplifying some of the effects of poverty, and the remarkable way in which the timid and obsolete poor law aggravates the particular evil it was designed to prevent.

Let us begin with the infirmary, in which some of the effects of poverty are most poignantly evident. The infirmary takes those cases which are sent to it by the district medical officer or the relieving officer. In this example of an East End workhouse, as in many others, the wards are admirably planned, warmed, and ventilated. The sick could be nursed under no better conditions.

It is tea-time ; and in the comfortable firelight and the subdued radiance of the electric lamps, a group of blue-clothed convalescents is seated

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about a table, and the rest of the patients are having their tea in bed. In this ward, most of the stolid, rugged figures are suffering from ulcers on the leg. The healing of an ulcer is a slow process, the slower—in the patient's view—the better, as a rule. Here is a middle-aged, dull person, whose limb is nearly sound again. He may be grateful, but he is not glad. The day of his discharge draws near, and the renewal of the precarious mean warfare of the streets. Here is another, whose affliction is incurable, save by amputation. He has twenty years of work in him; but his leg provides him excellent food, soft lodging, and skilled attendance. He has no idea of parting with that valuable investment. Indeed, why should he? These are nearly all elderly men, hawkers, casual labourers, or of "no occupation," who, if they ever had a zest for life's conflict, have long since lost every spark of it. For the younger patients, wretched weedy boys, sprung from the vilest homes, the Sister has more hope. They are amenable to that good influence of hers; but—and here is the point—how long will it live, when the streets close them in once more? Here, in a word, is a collection of useless, stricken humanity, together with some material a little more plastic; harboured in comfort, tended by skill and devotion and kindness.



## THE WORKHOUSE AND INFIRMARY

So, in the next ward, where are the graver cases. Here are men struck through and through with the poison of a contagious disease which the law has the power to prevent, a power which the law refuses to exercise. It even refuses to enforce notification. The responsibility of these refusals is so tremendous, it inflicts so profound an injury upon the community, and deals so widely in death, that the respectable decline even to consider it. But, they do not thereby escape the responsibility, or avoid the consequences. Let us be quite plain. A nation that, rather than face facts, allowed a pusillanimous Government to repeal certain sections of the Contagious Diseases Acts; and that cowardly acquiesces in the miserable hypocrisy of a false morality that still prevents their re-enactment; must inevitably pay the price enacted by the pitiless and immitigable operation of natural laws. Every sane man knows it. Meanwhile, the venom spreads. Thousands of lives are squandered, millions of money are wasted; the men of the Services are steadily diminished year by year, their training lost, to be replaced by others; and the tale of private affliction and of innocent victims is never full. But, the respectable go by on the other side; and the rulers, no longer statesmen, but amiable and infatuated gamesters, dicing

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with the destinies of a nation, continue to sow the wind.

Here, is a grey-haired man standing in the shadow, a bandage about his neck, his hands loosely clasped before him, a latent horror in his darkened eyes. The community pays for the care of the rest of his shattered life—it cannot give it back to him.

Various smitten with divers ills, are the dim figures recumbent upon the beds ranged against the walls. Many of them have tuberculosis, in one form or another. In their crowded and festering homes, the infection lives and spreads. It struck the two sallow boys standing listlessly beside the fireplace. One was earning wages, which his parents spent in idleness. The other was taken before he was old enough to work. It is hard upon the boys.

And what of the children? In the next ward, is a cheery little chap of two years old, who is afflicted with incurable hip disease. His parents are now in prison because they cruelly neglected and ill-used him. In the next bed, and the next, are tuberculosis babies. Opposite, lies a little fair-haired girl, so dreadfully afflicted with tubercle that she can never walk, or even leave her bed. These little ravaged creatures, much of whose hopeless ill, in a righteous State,

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would not occur, lie now in the midst of all that knowledge and charity can provide—too late.

In the workhouse itself, in a long ward divided into three rooms, of which the middle chamber is a living-room, and the two end ones are dormitories, live the insane. Some one in bed in the corner, shouts and bellows incoherently. A head rolls and mutters on the pillow, glassy-eyed. A bent figure, its glance turned inward, shambles to a chair in the corner, huddles into it, droops its head, and is still. Here, also, do disease and poverty and its ministers exact a dreadful wage, the last degradation of the tortured frame. Here, also, the community pays all, to ease the tardy way of the living dead to the grave. It begins to pay, too late. The same conditions that produced this death in life remain unaltered, and continue to produce it still.

But, near by, are better things. Here, are the corridors on which open the great rooms in which the aged sit and bask in the warmth, all herded together, the old women by themselves, the old men by themselves. During the day the old men work at their trades, and help to clean the place if they are fit to do so; after half-past five they sit and smoke, or read newspapers, or talk, or fall asleep. The women, excepting the infirm, sew and clean, and wash by day. They are divided into

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two classes, the one being reckoned somewhat superior to the other, each of which has separate quarters. They look comfortable enough, seated in their cushioned, high-backed elbow chairs. With these, and with the questions that affect their well-being, we are not now concerned.

It is with the able-bodied pauper that we have to do. Here he is, two or three hundred of him, packed in a large hall downstairs. The most of these men are elderly. They have a dull, shiftless, obstinate aspect. They slouch in their walk. These are they who pick oakum all day, and who, if they dislike picking oakum, claim their discharge and go—into the streets, and the shelters, living as they can until they choose to come in again. They do not go to look for work, which is not what they desire. Some among them are old hands, who can pick their four pounds of oakum in a morning. They have earned their ease for the rest of the day, and they take it.

Out of all these, the Labour Master, whose business it is to learn to distinguish, picks four men. These four, and these only, he knows, he says, to be genuine workmen. The first is a big, stolid labourer. The second is a middle-aged man with quick grey eyes, a tin-plate worker. The invention of machinery has displaced the men in the tin-plate trade—here is one of them.

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The little work that is left goes, not to him but, to the younger man. The third, a short, dark man, is a bricklayer's labourer. The fourth, a boy of twenty, is a casual labourer ; that is to say, he has never learned a trade. The Labour Master knows no sentiment ; he has years of grim experience behind him ; and if he declares these men to be honest fellows, it is odds but he is right.

Curious to remark in your disciplined and experienced Poor Law officials, the tacit indignation with which they regard the blind stupidity of the Poor Law which it is their duty to administer. The Poor Law forces them daily to lodge and to feed a ragged regiment which any enlightened State would long ago—a hundred years ago—have set to productive labour. But oakum-picking and stone-breaking is all the State can invent. All the prattle of the theorists during all these years has resulted but in this. Complacent Boards of Guardians are ignorantly elected year by year, to perpetuate this enormous folly. And it is stated in the thirty-fourth annual report of the Local Government Board, that some two hundred and eighty-six million has been spent during the last twenty-seven years, upon pauperism.

Consider now this vast and costly building, but

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one of many, with its infirmary, its workshops, its oakum-rooms, its halls and dormitories, its fifteen hundred inmates, the sick babies, the tainted boys, the rotting men, the sick, the malingerers, the lunatic, the blind, the crippled, the aged, the able-bodied wastrel, and the tiny handful of honest workmen. What does it all mean?

It means, first of all, that the community is paying a bigger price in men and money, in trying to cure that which is past remedy, than ever it would have spent in wise prevention. It means, again, that the workhouse, which was presumably designed to provide a refuge for the honest workman, does actually house the professional idler, to the almost entire exclusion of the honest workman in search of a job.

In the workhouse, as in the casual ward, the State, at great expense and with great labour, encourages and supports in idleness a great army of potential industry. So long as the man who will not work is not made to work, so long will the Poor Law continue to defeat its own object. And so long as the children are not taken altogether from those parents who have proved themselves unfit for their charge, so long will the parasites of the State continue to eat into its heart.

## XVIII

### THE CASE OF A SINGLE BOROUGH

POVERTY does not only reside east of Aldgate. In Mr. Charles Booth's valuable map, the districts south the river are largely coloured blue, merging here and there into black, which signifies the lowest deep. It does not matter, of course, upon which district the attention is fixed, so long as the object is to ascertain the real conditions and results of lack of employment, since these are much the same in all. But, in estimating the problem as a whole, it is to be remembered that bitter poverty dwells north, east, south, and also west. Moreover, since the machinery provided by the Unemployed Act of 1905 has not yet had time in which to tabulate results, and since, consequently, there are no statistics of the present state of affairs available, there are many persons who are able to affirm quite simply (I have heard them) that actual lack of employment does not exist.

Now, in the case of Bermondsey, we have an

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array of certified facts which are merely incontrovertible. They relate to the winter of last year, 1904. If the distress be clearly shown to have existed then, it will hardly be denied, all things considered, that it exists to-day in an aggravated form. To take a single instance of that aggravation. Every one knows that the trade of the Port of London is fast leaving it. One result is, that the men of the docks south the river, who used to earn good wages during the summer, and who have, in consequence, been able hitherto to live on their savings during the slack months of the winter, have not, this year, been able to save on their summer earnings.

In November, 1904, a committee appointed by the borough council of Bermondsey opened two labour bureaux, at which men were invited to register their names. At the same time—and here is the important point—two investigators were appointed, whose business it was to inquire into the circumstances of the applicant. The object of their investigations was to ascertain, first, if the information supplied by the men as to themselves, was correct; and, second, to discover those cases which were in direst need, so that they might have first claim. If the information were found to be



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incorrect, the men who gave it were struck off the list.

Here, then, at the outset, we touch the vital factor in all such undertakings, the personal equation. Everything depended, in the first instance, upon the tact and acumen of the investigators. The success of every enterprise must always, under all circumstances, depend ultimately upon the personal equation. In this case, they were the investigators who had to apply the first test. The second test was provided by the conduct of the men when they were actually set to work. It may be said, at once, that the second test confirmed the evidence of the first. The result, in figures, was that out of 4313 men who made application, 3086 were passed by the investigators; and those 3086 as a whole conducted themselves well. There were thus about one-quarter of the men who registered their names who could not stomach work. Had the result been the other way about, one would hardly have been surprised. That, in a district largely peopled by the waterside labourer and the casual labourer, three-quarters of the men should have been honestly out of a job, is a fact extraordinarily significant. On the other hand, we have to bear in mind that the council, being desirous to use a limited sum of money for the relief of as many

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persons as possible, instituted a series of turns of three days' work each, for each man, at intervals ; so that the ingrained habit of the casual labourer, of working for three or four days and then knocking off for the next three or four days, found no interference.

The investigator must, of course, be a man who knows his people, either because he is one of them, or because he has lived and worked among them. He must be tactful and shrewd, and wholly proof against blandishments.

When he sets to work, he has in his possession the chief facts in each man's case, furnished by the man himself, and written down. He goes to each man's house, and ascertains by direct inquiry, particulars dealing with the following matters :— Name, address, how long living there, age and occupation, where last employed, and how long, where longest employed and how long, reason for leaving, how long out of work, work regular or irregular, earnings when in work, present earnings, prospect of regaining work, particulars of family, other dependents, earnings of family, other income, whether in receipt of poor relief, rent and number of rooms, arrears of rent, references, member of trade or other provident society, any experience of country work, remarks.

It is a point to be particularly noted that, in

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the cases of most acute distress among the honest workmen, the investigator has, in practice, the greatest difficulty in arriving at the truth. These people will practise evasion out of pride, even to one who, if not precisely one of themselves, has still worked alongside some of them. The rent-book, which each tenant possesses, is an index. The man who is partly an impostor, will show a round sum of arrears, whose total may excite philanthropy. The honest workman will scrape sixpence here and a shilling there, making up leeway when he can.

In Bermondsey, the investigator has to inquire into the cases of men of an extraordinary variety of trades, both skilled and unskilled. All about the river, are the vast docks and basins and gigantic warehouses, employing the waterside trades, dock and waterside labourers, porters, barge-builders, lightermen, shipwrights and the men of subordinate trades, seamen, firemen, and watermen. Together with these, are the "land transit trades": carmen—a great many—horse-keepers, porters of all sorts—railway, market, fruit, hop, and fish porters. Further inland and scattered, are the men of the building trades and trades allied, of whom the labourers number the most. Then, there are the leather and skin trades: dressers, finishers, tanners, curriers,

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skinners, skin-dressers, and so forth, and the manufacturers, trunk and boot makers, harness and accoutrement makers, and the like. Then, the metal trades: the workers in brass, tin, iron, lead, and wire, engineers and their labourers, fitters, plumbers, blacksmiths, and electric wiremen. Then, the wood-working trades, of whom carpenters and sawyers number the most; the printing trades, and miscellaneous, the unemployed list in this instance containing men of nearly every trade. Of these, the trade that numbered most unemployed, was that of warehouseman.

In the water transit trades, there were unemployed, 1487; in the land transit trades, 524; building trades, 1217; leather and skin, 426; metal, 299; wood-working, 102; printing, 29; miscellaneous, 299. Total, 4313. But of these, as I have said, 1227 were rejected; so that the actual total was 3086.

The council raised a loan, and set the men to work upon road-making and the laying of sewers. "It should be remembered," says the report of the council, "that some of these works were executed during the short hours when the same amount for wages is paid for a day of eight hours (shortest time just prior to and after Christmas), nine hours, and full time of ten hours per day.

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This in itself would of necessity make the cost of the work heavier. Also the men employed were to a great extent physically unfit for navvy work, and although they were probably doing their utmost, the results were much less satisfactory than would have been the case had navvies and labourers used to the work been engaged." In the result, the cost of road-making exceeded the estimate, to which had been added a margin for the increased cost of unemployed labour, by about £700 upon a total of £31,805—not a great deal.

Doubtless, the provision was the best which, under existing circumstances, the Council was able to make. But, consider the waste of skilled labour involved, and the drain upon vitality of unaccustomed labour. The men who were not used to heavy manual toil were strained to exhaustion, and after two hours their hands were bleeding. If that be not a test, what is?

Forty-three men were sent to the Salvation Army colony at Hadleigh, in Essex; twenty to Garden City; and fourteen to Mr. Fels' estate at Hollesley Bay, in Suffolk.

Four hundred and twenty men applied to be assisted to emigrate. But, as there is no effective State machinery to fulfil one of the most pressing needs of the Empire, private resources were only able to send fifteen men altogether.

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Such were the chief characteristics of the action taken in one borough, last year. Needless to say, the measures were merely temporary. The same difficulty, increased in the meantime, has again to be faced.

But, at least one fact has been established: the fact that some three thousand men of all trades, in one borough alone, were out of a job, and were willing to take any work that was offered them. And to-day, if you go south the river, you shall see the poor devils fighting to get first to the dock gates, and loitering, hour after hour, at the corners where the ganger knows he can find them, and tramping from place to place from daylight to dark.

## XIX

### THE LOST BATTALION

BESIDES the men, who, having served their time in the Army, are secretly contending against overwhelming odds in all sorts of obscure nooks of this disastrous city, there are a thousand men or so—according to official estimate—who are drifting through the casual wards and shelters. Strong fellows, disciplined, accustomed to service, they fall away so soon as the pressure of discipline is relaxed, and gently decline down and down. The State lets them go, without a thought, the Service men, shiftless and steady alike. And whether they will not work, or cannot get a job, they are still both a charge upon the community and an utter waste of man-power. It has ever been the same, since the wounded archers of Agincourt were left to live or die, as God pleased.

This is the story of a soldier of the lost battalion, whose ability and steadiness of purpose have been tested, and whose character has thereby been established. He does not stand alone in

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these respects ; but, the men of the lost battalion who are fighting real distress are hard to find, because they will not ask for help. This man was only discovered by an accident.

Last winter, when the river-side people were bitterly in need, hundreds of heavy-footed men were roaming the streets, and clustering about the dock gates in search of a job. After dark, they came home to such rags of food as their wives had scraped together, and went to bed to get a few hours' sleep before starting again upon the search. But, one there was who could not stay in the house, in which the children were crying with hunger. After a whole day in the cold, gloomy streets, the soldier went out again to walk and walk, driven by the spectre of starvation. His neighbours knew of his night-wanderings—what do they not know ?—and they also knew, and his wife knew, that there would very soon come a morning when he would not return, because he would have drowned himself. They have experience to teach them, have the water-side folk, and they know the signs.

By this time, the borough council had borrowed money, and had opened a register for the unemployed. They appointed an investigator, who went to the home of each man who registered his name, to inquire into his actual circumstances.



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Down in the remote fastnesses of Rotherhithe, in the heart of a labyrinth of docks and warehouses, and dim streets, and ancient churches hemmed in by close-set tombs, there is a silent street of staid, old houses, long since fallen into decay. The investigator came to the silent street of decayed old houses, and a neighbour told him of the soldier. I do not know why the soldier had not entered his name on the list of those wanting employment. It may have been that he could not bring himself to make his case known ; but, it is more likely that, in the state in which he was, he had lost all hope and enterprise ; or, he may have thought that a turn of three days at intervals, was but a desperate resource for a man with seven children. At any rate, the investigator found him ; and, being a man both good and shrewd, he had the soldier sent without a day's delay to the Salvation Army Labour Colony at Hadleigh.

We have now to trace his history up to that point. He was forty years of age, a sturdy, fair-haired, honest man, fit for any job. Seventeen years before, he had entered the Army. At the same time he married—off the strength—a pretty, dark-haired girl of Rotherhithe. That was foolish. However, while he was upon foreign service, in Malta, the wife worked at a jam factory ; and,

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having only one child, she did fairly well. After leaving Malta, he went to Bermuda and to Halifax, having come home upon furlough in the intervals. After twelve and a half years' service, he was discharged. His discharges, which I have seen, are marked "good" and "very good." When the South African war broke out, he volunteered, served throughout the war, took his discharge, and came home again to Rotherhithe. He then obtained work in the docks, during four consecutive months. Followed, the usual slackness of trade, and the fall to competition for casual labour with thousands of other men in like case. By this time, he had seven children, of whom the eldest, a girl of sixteen, was too delicate to work. It is to be remembered that, both before and after her birth, her mother had to work daily at an exhausting occupation. He was paying eight shillings a week for four rooms in the old, panelled house. When the investigator found him, he owed twenty-six shillings for rent, and both he and his wife were starving. The children were living on a little parish relief. Remember, he had served his time on foreign stations, and he had fought throughout that most remarkable campaign in South Africa, and the end of it was that he was walking the streets, considering the possibilities of suicide. As I have said, he was

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saved by an accident. Remember, also, that men who work with their hands are well acquainted with many a like instance; and you will understand one reason for their dislike to the notion of universal service. It is associated in their minds with the State's treatment of the soldier, of which they know.

Our friend, then, went down to Hadleigh, where he did excellent work, and obtained a good recommendation. After a month, he came up for the usual three days' furlough, which is granted to the men in order that they may have a chance of getting other work, and that they may visit their families. During the three days, he was offered a job in the docks. He thought it worth while to take it, so that another man might get the chance of being sent to Hadleigh. But, the job was done after three days, and by that time his place at Hadleigh was filled up. The borough council, however, knowing his record, gave him a time of continuous work upon the roads, which carried him through to the summer. During the summer, as there was more business doing in the docks, he was able to exist upon an occasional day's work, like the rest of the dock labourers. Then, he took his whole family to Paddock Wood, to the hop picking. He had his own tent, so that they were not herded with the rough crowd about

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them. During three weeks, they made five pounds. Their expenses were two pounds five shillings, so that they cleared two pounds fifteen. When they came home, two pounds had to go at once for arrears of rent, so that they began the winter on fifteen shillings among nine persons, and no prospects. The soldier has been out all day and every day, and occasionally he makes a few shillings. He is out now, as I write. His wife toils all day to keep the children dressed and tended, and fed, and the place as clean as may be.

"You see," she said, "I can't go to work as I used to do, because of the children, or else I could do it. But I can't leave them." She looked down upon them with a weary smile; a tall, dark-eyed woman, handsome still, her hair a little grey, standing beside the littered table, in the dim room with the smoked-yellow panels. Three little girls are eyeing the visitor, and two more children are rolled up upon the bed, asleep. There were three herrings for dinner, which cost a penny. Their scales gleam blue and silver, a single bright spot in the brown gloom. Two of the cheery little fair-haired girls begin to talk of what they did in the country, and the third, small and black-haired, plays with the salt upon the table, while the mother relates the story of the year. She does not complain; but she can-

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not hide a nervous eagerness, the hope that the visitor may have come with help for the husband. Alas, there is no help. So we leave her in the dusky room, whose carved woodwork once looked down upon prosperous master-mariners, taking their ease between voyages. That was before the ships began to leave the Port of London, when the gangers used to hunt the streets to find men to unload the cargoes coming in from all the world.

Not far off, in Rotherhithe, there dwells another old soldier, a man of the lost battalions of another age. He is a veteran of the Crimea, and his pension is ninepence a day. He lives with his son in one room, for which he pays three and threepence a week. His pension, which is paid quarterly, is regularly expended so soon as it is drawn, upon arrears of rent, and in repaying money borrowed in order to get food and the necessaries of life.

His son, who is twenty-three, has been fighting a losing battle for the old man ever since he left school. He was a biscuit baker, and he worked for six years in the factory of Messrs. Peek, Frean, and Co. The night work broke his health, and in March, 1903, he had to leave. He got a trucking job upon a wharf; and when that failed, he became a barman. But, he gave up that

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occupation in order to come home to look after the old gentleman, his father. Then he got a job, at ten shillings a week, as odd man at a wharf. That job came to an end in the slack season ; and, when the investigator found him last winter, he had pawned his watch and chain, his boots, and his clothes. And because the married men were given work before the bachelors, by the borough council, the boy was left to drift away. This is the outline of the unfinished story of the son of a soldier of the Crimea, foredone and forgotten in a shadowy antre of the saddest city, and the cruellest, in the world.

Drifting through it and wasted, or fighting a hopeless fight, or dying in corners, are the men of the lost battalion. The call of the bugle is very far away and forgotten, and all that armed and strenuous life is done and dead. The scorching sunlight of the tropics, the eager frost of the night, the familiar tedium of the barrack square, the vast plains of Africa, their gigantic pageant of the dawn and the sunset, and their mysterious river-voices, the long marchings and the fightings, the whine of the bullet, the crowded troopship and the green landscape of England at last : all lives in the memory but as a dream that is dreamed, fading and fading amid the deadly streets.

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The soldiers are pressed into the ranks of other regiments, the regiments of the industrial army, the army of peace, whose defeats are crueller far to the vanquished than are the vicissitudes of the bloodiest campaign.

## XX

### NO CHANCE

THE street is one of many, its two lines of two-storied houses facing each other's curtained windows across a deserted road. The tenants can no longer afford to occupy the houses by themselves, so that each house has two sets of inhabitants. It is a secretive district, and you might walk through the street for twenty years and never gain the knowledge of a single fact concerning the people who dwell behind the dingy muslin curtains. For the way to the heart of London lies through the shut door.

This dismal street leads directly to the dock gates. Beyond them, are wide spaces of open water, and here and there the shadowy noble figures of ships. And so you might guess that the people living hard by, had some business in the great docks. A few there are, indeed, who work among the shipping, but, for the most part, the dockers live in meaner quarters. It is the skilled workman who rents half a little house



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hereabout ; but his fate is the same as that of the docker, his neighbour, who is starving because the ships come no more to Port of London as they used to come.

In the first-floor front room a man is at work, with brush and paints, in a corner, upon a five-foot board, which bears the four-inch block letters of an advertisement. He works in the corner, because that is the only vacant space in the room. A bed stands against the wall opposite the windows. Between them, is a table, upon which stands a large, wooden model of a church, and beside it, lies the half-finished model of a yacht.

As the visitor enters, the painter puts his board aside to dry, and holds out his hand with the unfailing courtesy of the poor. He is a middle-sized, broad-shouldered person, with thick hair touched with grey, an honest, open face, and lively grey eyes. He is a skilled and industrious English workman, of the kind that is the best in the world. Such men are rare ; and the monstrous commercial conditions and the trades unions together, are pressing him out of existence altogether. The man has had no work for six weeks, except what he calls "dribs and drabs," of which the board in the corner, a half-crown job, is one ; he is half-starved ; yet he is perfectly

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patient, cheerful, and courteous. His exact position is this. His wife has taken a place as cook, in the suburbs. Her wages are eight shillings a week. His child has been placed in a family, which charges five shillings a week for her board and lodging. The two rooms he occupies cost him five-and-six a week. He owes for two weeks.

"You see," he says, simply, "I knew that if I was by myself, like, I could do without a lot of little things, the others being provided for. I can always make do. If I have one loaf for six days, I cuts that loaf into six pieces."

He exhibits his model of a church with the pride of a parent. "I worked at it, off and on, for years," he said. "Not that I know anything of architecture, for I never been taught, you understand." He opens the folding-doors of the west entrance, and introduces a light into the columned nave. The interior is completely furnished with pews, pulpit, altar, and organ. The dormer-windows may be opened by the congregation—who would be about an inch and a half in stature—by means of rope and pulley. The chancel is roofed with glass, so that the light may fall from above. A bell chimes in the steeple, and there is a space in the belfry in which to

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place the machinery for ringing tunes. There is a clock face on each of the four sides of the tower, which may be lighted from within. The roof is constructed of wooden tiles, laid separately and painted red. The exterior is profusely carved with strange forms that, viewed from a distance, look quite like architectural ornament. They are the product of an observant mind which has never been trained to decipher form, so that it cannot accurately see it. But, what a superb toy for a children's hospital this sacred edifice would be !

This self-taught cabinet-maker also exhibits an over-mantel, neatly made in hard wood. The portraits on the walls, both pictures and frames, are also the work of his hands. They are remarkable portraits, a branch of the art of sign-painting, which is part of this man's trade. He is a skilled house-painter, he paints signs, he can draw lettering very well, he has taught himself a certain amount of joinery and cabinet-making, he will take any job of any sort that he can get—and he can get nothing.

His history, dating from last year, is upon record. When the borough council, early in the winter of 1904, opened a register for the unemployed, this man put his name down. When the investigator visited him, he owed six weeks' rent,

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and he and his wife and child were starving. He was promptly sent down to the Salvation Army Colony at Hadleigh, where he was put to heavy manual labour. Here, he remained for nine weeks, and he did so well that he was sent on to the London County Council works at Ewell, near Epsom. During his absence, his wife did what she could to supplement the scanty wage. She used to walk into the City and back, three miles each way, on the chance of getting a little stay-making to do. Sometimes she got work, sometimes she got none.

When the work at Ewell was done, and the man came home, he obtained a short job of painting, under a contractor. When that was finished, he was able to get work during the rest of the summer, on short time. That is, three or four days a week instead of six. Work was slack. The result was that, instead of being able to save something from the earnings of the summer, according to custom, he could barely manage to exist, and must face the winter, penniless.

Here, then, is the case of a skilled workman, whose ability and industry have been sufficiently tested. Observe the working of the process. Work is slack during the summer; but, being a competent and trustworthy man, he is able to work short time. Work fails entirely when the

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winter sets in ; as for casual unskilled jobs, there are thousands clutching at the few which occur—and even so, our friend took on a “lumping” job, which means carrying immense weights of timber from the dock to the sheds. Then, there is simply no work at all, and no money, except a shilling here and there for “dribs and drabs.” The wife goes out charing or cooking, and so begins the dissolution of the home. Despite her efforts, they are slowly starving, and the rent falls in arrear. Then, the borough council opens relief works, and the skilled workman is thankful enough to leave his home, to be put under the Salvation Army, and to wield pick and shovel for a bare subsistence. He gets sixpence a week to buy tobacco and stamps for himself, and three days’ furlough a month. Meanwhile, his wife, anxious to make up arrears, tramps and toils for a few pence at home. The father is away altogether, the mother out during much of the day. The children suffer in consequence. In this case there was only one child, and the evil was, therefore, less in degree.

Then, during the summer, the man is able to rejoin his own trade, and the home is established again—for the time. But, there is so little doing, that he has again to work short hours ; and, when the winter comes, it is the same disastrous

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business over again. The home is immediately broken up altogether. The man, like a good fellow, sees that his wife and child are housed and fed, and maintains the deserted home, by himself, as best he may.

Now, it is often urged that the workman should learn more than one trade, so that he could, as occasion served, turn from one to the other. Here is a man—one of the very few—who has done so. He has neglected nothing. He is skilled, steady, and industrious. But the best that charity can do for him is to set him to unskilled labour, and then to desert him altogether. He gets no chance.

There he is now, alone in his dim room, with his models, and his portraits, and his useless tools, and the ashes in the grate.

## XXI

### THE SKILLED WORKMAN

THIS is the story of what happens to the skilled workman, when he is displaced by reason of those fluctuations in trade, whose causes are commonly attributed by the statesmen and other theorists who regard the subject, to the operation of laws, as immutable as those which regulate the rising of the sun. The laws of industry, however, are not the laws of nature. They are, as a matter of fact, the arbitrary rules of an entirely artificial system elaborated by a section of the community, for the purpose of serving its own ends. In the process of the working of that system, it results that a good many persons are kept on the edge of starvation. And it is only by the use of methods which are a direct violation of the rules of the system, that some of them are kept alive at all.

We will take the case of skilled workmen, who are not occupied in "seasonal" trades, in which there is a regular demand for labour at certain

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periods of the year, and an equally regular decline in that demand, at the end of those periods. Since it is known that in these trades employment is seasonal, the intervals can be taken into calculation, and partly, at least, provided for. Not so with the steady trades. Fluctuations and depressions and the individual circumstances of particular firms, are unknown quantities; and, therefore, they cannot be reckoned in advance.

In a large, pink block of buildings in Bermondsey, there lives a man who was once a maker of hats. He is a young man of thirty-three. Until the summer of 1904, he had been continuously employed by the same firm for sixteen years. He had married, of course, and, equally of course, he had begotten more children than he could ever hope adequately to nurture. He had four children, aged seven, six, four, and two years respectively. He paid five and fourpence a week for two small rooms in the large pink block of model buildings aforesaid.

Towards the end of the summer of last year, the firm for whom he worked moved their factory to Northampton, and our hatter was discharged. For seven weeks, did he range the streets in quest of work; and every day the dreaded workhouse loomed nearer. Rather than enter that



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last port of degradation, the crew would run the ship under. So then began the days of creeping despair, the gradual process of descent.

The man would rise very early, drink a cup of tea, made by pouring water on leaves already used twice or thrice, eat a piece of bread, and go forth into the streets, where the carts were already rolling. The sun would climb the sky behind the leaden canopy of London, and the whole mighty procession of the myriad busy life about him would wheel into full circle, leaving him aside, stolidly picking his way through the dust and the turmoil, like one fallen out of existence. He would come to the unassuming front and the glazed doors of workshop after workshop, to meet ever the same refusal from the spruce pompous clerk inside, and to turn away. Within a week he had exhausted the workshops of his own trade; hope died within him; and he came to aimless exploration in search of casual jobs, and the listless loitering at street corners, the "stand" of the casual, to which the gangers send if they want an extra hand for a few hours. So, he would come home each night, too tired to speak, to the close, fetid room, the large-eyed, wan children, the over-driven wife, the scanty scraps of food. So, after brief sleep, filled with the light-headed dreams of hunger, would come

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the shock of the awakening to the pitiless, implacable truth, and the slow torture would begin again.

Meanwhile, the wife, a small, dark, determined person, contrived to make a few shillings a week by means of incredible toil and perseverance; and the children, suffering by her absence, grew dirtier and more unkempt, and thinner, day after day. It is well for the poor, sometimes, that they do not look beyond the day, letting the things of the morrow take care of themselves. Then the household possessions began to go to the pawnshop; two or three cups and saucers, a couple of spoons, a chair, a few odd books, the sheets from the bed, a trifle of winter clothing, the china ornaments from the mantel-shelf. They are slipping fast on the down-grade now. The sultry, dusty summer is over, and it is cold at night. They owe a couple of weeks' rent, and they expect to be turned out when the collector calls. For seven weeks, they have had but just enough food to sustain life; and they are very low.

Then it was, that the investigator employed by the borough council found them. The man had put his name upon the register of the unemployed. He was sent forthwith to Garden City, there to make roads. His business was to make

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hats, not roads; but he stuck to his job; and the tough physique and the dogged determination of your real workman carried him through. There were men, like himself, belonging to skilled trades, who stood and wrung their bleeding fingers in the trenches, and cried. But they kept on, those who were honest workmen. From Garden City he went on to the County Council works at Ewell; and from thence to Hollesley Bay. The wages were but just sufficient to keep his wife and children.

They were at tea when I visited them. The large-headed baby of two years old, was sitting at a box before a cup of weak, stewed tea and tinned milk, and trying to eat a crust. Two little girls were helping their mother to clean the room, eating and drinking in the pauses of work, as the poor do. The windows were close shut, the air tainted. The poor furnishings were worn and ragged. Yet this woman counted herself lucky. To her, the investigator came as an angel from heaven.

In like guise, did he come to the house of a leather-dresser, taking a long flight from the pink, model buildings to the borders of the river. Here is a great, dark church, looming in the midst of a crowded graveyard, closed in with a screen of melancholy trees. A little lane of low

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houses, set here and there with trees, and bordered by square plots of garden, runs alongside the churchyard; remote, deserted, utterly silent, lost in the heart of the decaying city within a city, of the waterside. A passage leads between two rotting houses, into a court, and the court opens into another, shut in on one side by a shambling black fence, beyond which spire the masts of a ship. In the lower part of one of these dark houses, dwells the leather-dresser.

A short, eager woman, the habitual strained expression of an over-driven animal lined into her sallow face, comes from a shed, in which she has been washing clothes. This is the leather-dresser's wife. The leather-dresser is out, of course, looking for work.

The test of last year proved his mettle. There was some mysterious collapse in the leather trade—owing to the operation of those sacred laws of supply and demand, which have long since replaced the Decalogue—and towards the end of the summer our leather-dresser was out of a job. Then, began the usual routine; the tramping and the starving, the children's sufferings, the desperate efforts of the wife to earn money in the midst of the cares and disabilities of maternity, the rent falling behind, the shifts, the borrowings, the pawnings. This man had five weeks of

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hell before the investigator found him. He then owed four weeks' rent, and he would have been turned out, had the landlord perceived any likelihood of another tenant taking the rooms.

The leather-dresser was sent at once to the London County Council works at Ewell, where he remained for three months. He went to Ewell and back every day. Despite five weeks of scanty feeding, he was up every morning at half-past four o'clock in bitter cold weather, walked four miles to Waterloo, took the workmen's train to Ewell, worked at hard manual labour all day, left Ewell at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, and walked four miles back, from Waterloo to Rotherhithe, reaching home about seven o'clock. The strength and endurance of these men are extraordinary.

But, the Labour Colonies being only a makeshift expedient, our man was again out of work, when the job at Ewell was completed. With the money for an occasional day's work, the family have since been living upon the mother's scanty earnings at the wash-tub, and the seven shillings earned weekly by the eldest boy. The boy, of course, has not been taught a trade; and, so soon as he is eighteen or so, he will fall into the ranks of the unskilled. During this time, the mother has lost one child, and another has

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been born. After the unimaginable toil of last winter, they are no whit better off. They have gained nothing, except a few months of continued painful existence.

Such cases might be multiplied an hundred-fold: and, since last winter, the experience of which I have recorded, because it proved the men, there are many more.

There is the case of a packer, who has lived for fourteen years in the district (south the river), and who, until last year, had steady employment. Then came the hitch in the working of the resistless machine, and he was thrown out. After the round of unavailing search for work, he attempted casual labour at the docks. But, this family was saved from immediate ruin, at the expense of the children. Out of seven, two were over fourteen. The eldest, a girl, was in service. So soon as her father lost his job, she gave up her place, entered a biscuit factory, and lived at home, so that her earnings went into the common stock. This was bad economy, because, while she was in service, she earned more and cost less; but her mother complained that she spent her wages on herself—poor little wench. The eldest boy is earning seven shillings a week, which also goes into the common stock; but, despite these contributions, the family was fast

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slipping downwards. When the investigator found them, they were near starving. The man was sent to the Salvation Army Colony at Hadleigh, and from thence to Garden City. He was afterwards employed by the borough council, upon continuous work, at thirty shillings a week. When the roads were finished, he was again out of a job. That was three months ago. At this moment, he is temporarily employed at a big Stores, at his old trade of packing.

There is the case of a stonemason, who was in the employment of the Great Eastern Railway for seven years. The job was completed, and he was discharged. When the investigator found him, at the beginning of last winter, he had been out of work for seven weeks. He had a wife and two children. They were all starving. He was sent to a Labour Colony; and his wife moved into one room, for which she pays four shillings a week. While he was away one child died, and another was born. In the midst of these troubles she has kept the home going on thirteen-and-sixpence a week.

Here are but three proven cases, of skilled workmen, thrown out of steady employment, willing to work at anything, for any pay. They stand for thousands in like case to-day.

## XXII

### THE UNSKILLED WORKMAN

THE hand of time, and the hand of death, have fallen heavily upon this man. He is but fifty-six ; but, when there are scores of younger men from whom to choose, the grizzled elder, who has won his way to that point in life's journey by sheer hard labour, must even stand aside. So many hundred tons of dead weight shifted by might of muscle over all those years ; so many buildings, great and small, compacted in part by the toil of this man's hands—that is his life. The dead matter remains, the buildings endure ; only the human ant, among a myriad such insects, its work having been exacted from it, is cast away as worthless. There are plenty more ; and, in a strictly industrial community, its worth is reckoned solely by what can be got out of it and transmuted into money.

The worth of an honest and contented man, whose wages, fairly earned, suffice to keep him in health and comfort, and to nurture strong sons



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and daughters, is not reckoned in any way whatsoever. It is not an asset. It does not count. And yet, strange to say, the community that persists in dealing, upon the most approved principles, with men and women as so many perishable articles of commerce, is presently taken with a kind of dry rot at the vitals, and so dies, slowly and painfully, amid universal bewilderment.

This man did, indeed, nurture sons and daughters, who (so tough are the children of the poor) survived the wretched food and the exposure, ill-clad, in all kinds of weather. One daughter became a domestic servant; and here, at last, in a proportion of her wages, was the beginning of a scanty provision against old age and sickness and the lack of work. That was last year. But, the price of nature must be paid. And, in due time, it was paid as will appear.

The man, who had been working as a builder's labourer and a scaffolder, in the service of one firm, for thirteen years, was thrown out of employment. He was paying six shillings a week for a house of three rooms. He had five children. One, the daughter who was in service. Another daughter was married, so that she could contribute nothing towards her parents' support. The other three were aged thirteen, eleven, and nine respectively, and they were all at school.

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His wife was disabled by an ulcer upon her leg, so that she could not go out to work. There was thus no resource, save the earnings of the daughter in service, and an occasional shilling for an odd job, and the little lendings and gifts of the neighbours, most of whom were themselves in like case. So, this family continued to exist during the later summer and autumn; the man doggedly treading the mill assigned to all who lose their job; out at sunrise, tramp and loiter and tramp, and never a place to be found in all the teeming city, and then home to a starving house at nightfall. The woman, keeping still afoot by means of constant visits to the hospital, desperately struggling to keep the three children fed, and passably clean, and dressed, fit for school.

They were brought low, indeed, and they were sinking lower day by day, pressed down by want, and disease, and the burden of a hopeless future. But, they had a landlady who was kind, so that they were still able to exist upon the daughter's few shillings, which had otherwise gone in rent. As for the workhouse, they would, as such people will, fight to the last penny and the last crumb before they would enter the place upon whose threshold all hope is abandoned, and sullen shame takes full possession.

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Then, the blow fell. Nature demanded her price. If you are forced to rear a child on bad and insufficient food in unhealthy surroundings, the child will pay the penalty, soon or late. One night the daughter was brought home, very ill. She had an acute intestinal disorder. Next day she was dead. They pawned her clothes to pay for the funeral.

There was, indeed, nothing left but the pawnshop; and for the next few days clothes and small articles went one by one. Even so, they were starving. They had come, in a few weeks, to absolute destitution. They owed five pounds thirteen shillings for rent. The furniture had all gone, save an old mahogany chest of drawers which had belonged to the wife's mother, and which she held to the last. By this time, the winter had begun, and the man had entered his name upon the register of the unemployed.

It was at this point, that the investigator appointed by the borough council came to the house. He was able to save them—for the time. The man was sent down to the London County Council works at Ewell; and so they tided over the winter. But, when the work was finished at Ewell, the man was again out of employment. As every one knows, the building trade was slack during last summer, and you are to remember

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that our man was fifty-six. The younger men took the little work there was. In point of fact, the man has earned nothing since he left Ewell, except an occasional shilling. They have lived as "best they could." The rent, of course, fell into arrears, and the landlady—"very kind it was of her," says the wife—employed the man to whitewash and to repair the house in which he lived, and another in the same ownership, in lieu of payment.

The house in which these things happened, is hidden away in the heart of the dead city that is decaying, forgotten and unvisited, south the river. Here, is street after silent street of blinded houses and shut doors. Not a cart, or a van, or a person, or a dog, is to be seen. To all appearance, the place is utterly desolate, and there is about as much chance of getting work in it as among the sands of the Sahara. Behind those blinded windows and shut doors are nests upon nests of wretched families, hiding their poverty close; while the men are all hanging about the waterside, gazing upon the vast, empty docks, the muddy river, the great warehouses To Let.

From one such street, a three-foot-wide alley leads to a narrow paved court of small, dark houses. They, too, are close shut. The house of the bricklayer's labourer—who is out roaming

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the streets—is on the right hand. The visitor knocks, and the door is opened by a short, broad woman, whose shoulders are slightly bowed, and whose bright eyes look out from beneath a bush of greying hair. She stands while she talks, supporting herself with one hand upon the table, until, with an apology, she seats herself, trembling a little with pain and weakness. Her leg is very bad. She wears a thick bandage above her boot, wrapping the limb about from her ankle nearly to the knee. As she is fifty years old, it is probable that there is no cure, save amputation.

“The doctor, he says, ‘Now can’t you rest, not anyhow?’ ‘No,’ I says, ‘doctor, I can’t.’ I got to keep going, you see, to look after the house and the children, just as long as I can. But I can’t do no washing. I can’t keep at it long enough.” Her married daughter, who stands beside her, nursing a child, nods confirmation.

The door opens directly into the kitchen, against a fixed wooden screen, that forms a little entry. On the right, against the wall, stands the mahogany chest of drawers, which has been saved from the wreck. The room is low and dark, touched here and there with the glow of the fire smouldering in the ingle. A round table, all cluttered up with cooking utensils and the like,

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stands in the middle of the room. Despite her bitter poverty and her affliction, the sturdy efforts of this woman still keep a warm and comfortable room for husband and children. In one corner, a narrow stair leads to the two bedrooms above. They cling to the house, because it gives decent accommodation. And, since the landlady has allowed them to owe rent, they have hitherto been saved the last degradation of herding together in a furnished room.

The woman, grey-haired and bright-eyed, looking up as she bends forward to ease her leg, talks with perfect courage, composure, and courtesy, while the daughter, the child in her arms, stands silently by in the shadow.

"God bless you, sir, for what you did for us last year," she says to the investigator, who has come to see his old clients. "There's nothing this year yet, I suppose? Ah, well, perhaps there will be. We mus'n't grumble."

Alas, there is nothing yet. The investigator, in his most official tones, declines to hold out hopes which may be disappointed. "It makes your heart ache," is his comment, as we go away.

Nearer to the docks, there is a quiet street of fine, old houses, built in the late eighteenth century by well-to-do shipowners, sadly settling

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into decay. They are let in single rooms, now. In one such room, approached by a wide staircase with delicately carved balustrade, a man of thirty-three lives with his wife and his three little girls. He began life as a compositor, but the heat and the confinement affected his health, and he took to out-of-door manual labour. He is a tall, loose-built fellow, the familiar, hopeless look settled upon his dark face. His wife, a ruddy, cheery, buxom woman, comes bustling in from the wash-tub, the three little blue-eyed girls with her.

"Oh, yes," she says, "I was able to manage just nicely on the fourteen-and-six last winter. Only wishes we had it now! 'Twas a tight fit, to be sure. But there! we did it, and it came in regular, that was the best of it."

"I been to the C.O.S. this morning," growls the man. "Seems they wanted to know everything what happened from my birth certificate onwards. I don't expect—nor want—nothing from them. I wouldn't have gone if I'd a known the way a man is treated."

"Will there be anything this winter, sir?" asks the wife, wistfully, turning that simple, wholesome face of hers upon the visitor.

There is a sore need for something. The man has had but a day's occasional work for three

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months. They owe two weeks' rent. One of the little girls is delicate, and cannot eat the rough food which is all they can buy for her. These people, too, are fast slipping down and down, in the ancient room with the carved cornice, in the grave, quiet street whence the good days have long since departed.



## XXIII

### FALSE DAWN

FOUR of them sat in a close row on the sofa, and one drooped on a chair beside the door. Five good English lads, picked from scores like them, whom no man will employ, and whom none, save a few gallant societies and private friends, will help in any way whatsoever. These are the boys who, after being taught somewhat by the State at considerable expense, are immediately set to work by their parents to earn a small weekly wage at unskilled labour, such as errand-running, van attendance, paper-selling, packing-case making, rope-making, and the like. As the supply of boys is unlimited, so soon as they are eighteen, or a little older, they are discharged, and more youngsters are taken on at boys' wages. The case of the discharged youth is, perhaps, as bitter an instance of the cruelty of modern industrial conditions, and their wanton destruction, as you shall find. He has been a little educated ; he has worked and earned hard

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money; and then, just as he is beginning to feel his strength, he is cast away.

After some weeks, or months, of unavailing search for work, it is small wonder if the lad's spirit fails and his temper sours. He is not allowed to work. Very well, he says, then I will not. I've done my best. Who's to blame? And he begins to decline into the army of the bone-idle, the parasites. Truly, what else can he do? He was never allowed to learn a trade, and, as for emigration, that's for the married men. It is not made too easy for them; but, as for the young bachelor, the very man who is wanted (one would say) in Canada, if his emigration were a penal offence, its achievement could not be more discouraged. One might have supposed—in a moment, say, of visionary exaltation—that, in a country which is the head-quarters of an immense scattered Empire there would be such a person as a Minister of Emigration, whose business it was to see that those for whom England had no room, were immediately sent to a province which required them. But no. Nothing of the sort. Only a few private agencies, wretchedly hampered by want of funds, and not wholly unafflicted by petty individual fads and jealousies. . . . The result you see before you, in the eager, wistful row of boys.

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The trim, small youth in the corner, pale, quick-eyed, used to work in a rope factory. His hand was caught in a machine, and he had to go to hospital for three months. He received a small sum in compensation, which was spent by his father—and a sorning uncle—while he was laid up. When he was healed, he found himself out of a job. The rope factory would not have him again, and, in any case, he was too old to be engaged at boy's wages. "You see," he says, "the firm, they had to pay a hundred pound fine, for machinery improperly fenced. When the inspector come down, the boss, he shifts the guard all in one piece, all correct, and puts it back. But my solicitor, he was there, and he pulls the guard, and it all falls away from the framework. I'd 'a told him beforehand, you see. It's a cruel place. There was a man the week before, he got caught, and he was all tore up. Little bits of him all over the place. 'Ardly a day but there's an accident.

"Yes, it's cabinet-making I wants. It's a good trade. I could do something, if I got a chance."

He has done nothing, save an occasional odd job, during the past eleven months. But, how is he to enter the trade? His father, a dock labourer, gets the usual day or two in a week, or a month; he has no money to spend in

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apprenticing his son, or even to buy him tools. So there is the lad, still hopeful, still patient; still clean and neat in person, though the boots are dropping from his feet; and still baulked of honest ambition by unjust circumstance.

Next him, sits a strong, loosed-limbed fellow of twenty; grey-eyed, long-nosed, and full-lipped. There are sense and enterprise and humour in that lean, capable English face. He has had hard luck, this chap. Nearly two years ago, he found an advertisement for a farm labourer in Yorkshire. He had a good character; a friend backed him; and he got the job. He went down into Yorkshire and took hold, and worked well; and was perfectly happy. He had signed on for a year, and at the end of that time the manager kept him for another three months. But, there was a bad season; some of the stock were drowned in the floods, and the harvest was ruined. The farm was sold, and the boy had to come back to the wretched prison of the streets again. His father is a labourer in a gas works. The boy has four brothers, all grown men, and all out of work like himself, and a sister. He would sell the shirt from his back and the boots from his feet to get back to the land, or to emigrate. And he, too, is held impotent in that strange spell with which England is cursed. He, too, is still cheery

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and patient, hoping against hope. "I can turn my hand to anything on a farm," he says wistfully. "Any mortal thing I can do on the land."

Next him, sits one of his brothers—a dark, round-headed man of twenty-four, with a steady, honest eye. He was a sailor—deck-hand in a tramp, steamer. 'She was wrecked,' says he. "Drove on the rocks in the Gulf of Genoa, full speed a'ead. Some of us reckoned the pilot was drunk, but of course the old man, he couldn't say nothin'. There she was, hard and tight. We paid out a hawser astern, and put on full steam astern, and the hawser got mixed up with the propeller, and so we had to send a diver down to clear it. Three French torpedo-boats got us off at last, but the old tramp was bobbing up and down—*so*—with a hole in her you could 'a driven a cart and horse through. We was paid off and come home. Six weeks I walked about the docks, looking for a ship, till I was fed up with it. Did two summers brick-making in Buckinghamshire. Then they sold the brickfields, on account of the foreign bricks selling at thirteen-and-six the thousand, delivered, 'stead of two pounds four, the English. Pretty near starved in the country, after that."

Poor devil! He has been nine weeks out of a job. After all his tramping and roving, and

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hard work, he too, is lost again in the dismal labyrinth, and it is killing him, and his wife, and their little ones, and he can't get out. His home is altogether broken up, for his wife has been obliged to return to her mother. He himself is living with his father, the gas-works labourer, and the children are divided between the two houses—and little enough for them in either. He was foolish to have married, of course; but, when he married, he was a sailor, and he did not perceive that England was about losing her shipping trade. A great many people are in the same case. One or two visits to the docks would perchance clear their vision.

Next him, at the end of the sofa, sits a black-browed militiaman of nineteen. He has done nothing since he was out under training in May last. Before that he was in a rope factory, with boy's wages. Followed the usual course of events. He would enter the Army, but he has three small sisters dependent upon him, and a small boy, an adopted cousin. The small boy's mother is invalided; she has been in the Poor Law infirmary, and it is to be regretted that she did not allow her child to be placed in a Poor Law school. The militiaman's father is a glass-blower, out of all employment save a day here and there at his old factory, whence he was displaced by

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machinery. The factory itself is by no means flourishing, owing to the immense importation of German glass. There have been days when the soldier has left home at half-past five in the morning and has tramped the streets till dark without food or drink. He has walked until he became light-headed, and the lines of houses seemed now to expand and again to close upon him as he moved upon a pavement that rose and fell. Then, perhaps, on a lucky day, he would meet a fellow-workman of his father, who would give him a meal. There he sits, black-browed and sturdy, a trained man and a disciplined, bound by the same chain of unjust circumstance. He is beginning to lose heart; he has walked the streets the long dusty summer through, and worn through the autumn, and now he is facing the winter, sick of hope deferred.

"I could drive," he says, wistfully. "I can drive well. If I could get a carman's job, I should give satisfaction."

He is a silent lad, the soldier, and he says no more. He sits with his chin on his hand, and looks and looks out of his great black eyes.

The boy who sits on the chair beside the door, still and quiet, is in even worse case than the other four. He is the son of a widow, and he has been starved from his cradle. He is stunted,

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and his skin is of a dead grey pallor. He has the hopeless eyes of a captive animal. He, too, had employment in a rope factory; and he, too, was discharged in a time of slackness. If trade improves, his place will be taken by a youngster of fifteen. He has now been five weeks out of work. His mother rents one room, at half a crown a week; and the two struggle on together. Every day they rise very early, and go forth upon their separate ways, looking for work. The mother gets a job here, and a job there, washing and charing, at a shilling or eighteenpence a day. The boy gets nothing, seek as he may.

Now, these five boys are typical cases. They were selected out of many, by one who has known them for years, and who has befriended them. They are boys of good character. There are very many like them, also of good character, in the East and South to-day. There are also very many whose character is not so good; but, these also are valuable material going to waste for lack of opportunity, or of discipline, or both.

All alike, are implacably driven by the circumstances into which they are born, toward the condition of the irreclaimable loafer. The State enforces them to receive an education, which, since it teaches them to read and to write, enables them to earn money in the false



## FALSE DAWN

dawn of their youth. By the time they are eighteen or so, and fit for a man's job—if they had only learned how to do it—there is an end of their earnings, sometimes for ever. They are out in the streets, competing for casual unskilled labour with thousands of stronger fellows than they are. Soon or late, they fall away, and decline into the spiritless loafer. The thing is inevitable.

But the parent, you say, should have apprenticed his son to a trade. So he should—theoretically. The Socialist orator will affirm that the parent's wages are too low to permit him the expense. That is very often true. It is also true that the parents are often entirely selfish and lacking in foresight. Moreover, the parent is very often out of work, and the seven shillings a week which may be earned by the son, at the expense of his future, must serve to keep the home going in the present.

The fact remains that the community pays, and pays dearly, for the wanton, cruel waste of young manhood. And what of the poor chaps themselves?

## XXIV

### THE BRIDGE OF SIGHS

THERE is a chain of docks and basins, down East, that separates a tract of devious streets and poisonous courts, bordered by the river, from the great grey wilderness stretching northward. At night, the masts and yards of ships lying yonder are graven faintly upon a space of sky, which is framed between the tall, black warehouses; the gleam of dim lights shine here and there upon the still water; and nearer hand, a steamer with a blood-red funnel crouches under the wall. A bridge crosses one of the docks, the Bridge of Sighs. That is what the people call it, because this muddy, footworn bridge, with the rusty iron balustrade, is the way of escape into oblivion.

Hither, in the dark, creep broken men who have lost heart to come home night by night to starving wife and children. They come with a draught or two of the vile public-house liquor working in their brains. A plunge, and all is

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done. Hither, in the dark, come women, beaten at last, to end the matter. Sometimes, they come alone ; sometimes, they bring a child with them to the way of escape. They must be quick and wary, lest the policeman turn them back.

Here, upon the Bridge of Sighs, you may lean upon the rail, which is the step out of the world for many (look at the statistics, if you will), and consider the matter from its end, here, to its beginning. Northward, the serried miles of houses march unbroken to the dock side, and stop in a grim escarpment of brick ; southward, they thicken again to the edge of the tide ; and beyond the river are massed again for miles, until they straggle upon the marred face of the country. So vast a region of the ugly, the unclean, so many millions of herded human beings, under the wheels of a gigantic invisible machine. It grinds them down, maims and mutilates and slays ; and some of them crawl from under and escape to the bridge. But that is to take the business but faintly, and as in the gross : to regard it apart, as one contemplates an ant-hill. Since each one of the millions, clotted together as they are, has a separate personality, with a separate burden and a particular conflict to wage, it is only by knowing each that you may see the intimate truth. It is impossible ; the heart dies at the thought of a

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task so monstrous; a hundred lives would not suffice. So it is, that we shall never know all, but only little disjointed pieces. But, some of the trouble is common to a very great number, in varying degree; so that where we touch an edge of it, we may be sure that here is a main part in the complexity that makes the whole, driving inwards out of sight, into the mass. The end we know—it is the Bridge of Sighs; or, worse still, it is not that way hastened, but is drawn out to exhaustion. What is it in the darkness that broods upon the myriads swarming in the long ranges of close-set, brick-built cells, in whose heart this strip of sullen water glimmers, that brings them to the Bridge of Sighs? Steadfastly looking into the gloom, brief, lighted scenes from the incomprehensible, interminable drama reveal themselves, and are gone. These must be our clues.

A piece of a street, the twilight, ragged with fog, veiling the low roofs. The shops on either hand are dark, or a lamp burns smokily within. The bleared houses front the street with an obscene reserve. Children, huddled together, sleep on the thresholds. They left school at four o'clock. It is now midnight. They are waiting, unfed, for their parents. But, at the corner beacons an ample, yellow flare. The indistinguish-

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able, blotted figures, slouching or slatternly, that cumber the slimed pavements, draw ever towards it. The paint is polished from the doors where so many hands have slid upon them, the steps are worn into a curve with the scraping of so many footsteps. Further along, beyond the shops that are closed because there is none to buy so much as will pay for gas-light, another yellow flare. Near by, another ; and so on. The houses are empty, the shops closed, the street near deserted ; but the public-houses are full to the doors. Here are light, and warmth, and talk, and the pleasant stupefaction of liquor. The blowzed women, the gaunt men crowding within do not earn enough, scarce one of them, to pay for decent living and food for their children, did they never spend a penny on beer. Nevertheless, were you and I to dwell in filthy and verminous kennels under these leaden skies ; to leave them before sunrise and tramp and loiter about the streets in quest of work which cannot be found ; or to muddle miserably among half-clad, ailing children in a single foul room all day long, or to go charring for sixpence a day of fourteen hours ; and all on scraps of bread and bits of fish and stewed tea ; why, then, we should do the very same.

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Moreover, if we had home-work to do, by which we could with incessant industry earn as much as one shilling and twopence in sixteen hours, we should have small leisure to prepare a meal. We should, as these do, eat a little bread, and drink the beer that gives the delusion of food. They drink because they like it; because it stupefies pain; because it drives away hunger. And every glass is an injury to the child. It is not that they are drunken, though some of them are that, too. It is the constant lure of the yellow flare, that is not extinguished till half-past twelve, and twelve o'clock on Saturdays. Not until the public-houses close, can the street go to rest. Those who have gone to bed, cannot sleep for the noise, until the yellow flare goes out. 'Tis an invitation to all alike. The man in steady work responds to it about the middle of the morning; again at dinner-time; again when he knocks off at half-past five or so, when he takes a snack there, too, very likely; and so onwards till half-past twelve. Why should he go home? The casual labourer, with a few pence, takes the easy way, too; and he and his wife and children go short of food by that much. The woman with a penny or two cannot resist it. I have known a man in steady employment to spend, very often, the whole of his wages,

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received on Saturday night, before Sunday morning.

Sweep away the whole of the public-houses, and half the misery of the poor would go with them. That cannot be done—or so people say, with much more solemnity than they would devote to a proposal to disestablish the Church, or to legalise picketing. Close them at nine or ten, and the evil would be greatly abated. A Government conscious of its duty would have passed a closing Act ever so many years ago. In a word, the desperate case of the unemployed is rendered twice as desperate by drink. And the way to the Bridge of Sighs is very often lighted by the yellow flare.

The scene shifts. It shows a five-foot passage leading beneath houses to a court of the same width. A black stairway leads directly from a doorway to a dark landing. The door on the left opens into a room which is the width of the passage below, and about twelve feet long. Behind the door is a mattress, rolled up. Against the wall is a chair with a broken back. On the floor is a packing-case, and on the packing-case are two cups and a pewter spoon. Except the kettle on the smouldering fire, there is no other furniture in the room whatsoever. But, the room is clean. A short, square woman with a dogged,

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nomely face stands there, mute. She will not answer a visitor's questions, or she will frame replies to hide her destitution.

Her husband was a man in regular employment in a tea warehouse. After fifteen years' service, he was discharged in a time of trade depression. He tried to get work, failed, fell ill, and died. The woman was left with five children. Try as she might, she could not, even with a little outdoor relief, feed and clothe them to her respectable standard. One by one she parted with them, and they went to a Poor Law school. She still toiled, in the hope of being able to keep the youngest with her, and even to bring home the rest. But she was beaten. She had to let the youngest go. She was utterly alone, defeated, and without hope. She, too, went down to the Bridge of Sighs; but she was rescued; and there she is. To that rescue she owes it, at least, that her case became known to a kindly Mission, whose good women befriend her as they can. For, she is of the class that will starve in silence, rather than let their state be known by asking for help.

Again, the scene changes. It is the muddy street once more, in the bleak daylight. The footways are thronged with unkempt men and women, children released from school crowding



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among them. The brightly clad figures of the little girls, and the little boys dressed in any ragged garments that will cover them, eddy in and out the traffic. Huge vans go crashing down the roads that are no wider than they were a hundred years ago, when there was no such press of traffic. A child runs out into the road, there is a scream, the wheels jolt, slacken, and stop. It is all over. There are the thickening, instantaneous crowd, the policemen with notebooks, the procession to the hospital. These incidents do not much appear in the papers. They are too common. Why? Very often because the mother, being obliged to go out to work all day because her husband cannot get a job, or because he will not look for one, or because he is drunken, cannot at the same time attend to her children. She comes home to find a child gone. Sometimes this happens twice to her. And sometimes she, too, seeks the Bridge of Sighs.

Another scene. This time, a large, bare hall, the parish club-room. Seated at one of the tables are three or four sturdy, patient fellows, dockers, all—of course—out of work. It must be so, since the ships are leaving Port of London for Hamburg, Rotterdam, Dunkirk, and Antwerp, especially Antwerp; and since there is always a floating margin of men available for casual labour,

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numbering at a rough estimate, five thousand. One of these is a huge man with a great jaw, and deep furrows grooved from nostril to chin. His face is drawn, his eyes sullen. You may see in him, as in so many, the familiar blueness under the eyes, the cheek-bone defined under the sallow skin, which pouches about the lower part of the face. One day's work in five weeks is his tally. He was an engineer's labourer in steady employ. Last year, he lost his wife, and a child, and his job. His stepmother took one of the remaining children, his sister the other two. He put his scanty furniture in his sister's house, in which he has a bed. He applied to the relieving officer for leave to place his children under the Poor Law. He was told—so he says—that unless he became a pauper himself, he could not do so. To enter the workhouse, to be treated with the crowding wasters there as a wastrel, was, in his view, death. So, there he is, unable to leave the place to find work elsewhere, because of his children; unable to provide for them or for himself; starvation or the workhouse fronting him. He may not be an impeccable character; although to see his sad and furious eyes, as he talked, and his great fist thundering upon the table, was to incline to believe in his honesty; but, why should he be absolutely deprived of opportunity? He has seen

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and known more than one go down to the Bridge of Sighs. But I think, so far as he is concerned, it is very likely he will fling some others through the open door before he takes that way himself. There is that point, also, for the consideration of my lords and honourable gentlemen.

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IT has been no part of the author's purpose to set forth a solution of the problem, arising from the existing condition of things, whose aspects he has tried to present, as he saw them. Nor has he attempted to deal with the causes which have produced the problem. These enterprises are for wiser men. Rather has it been his sole endeavour, to show how the existing conditions affect the individual. For, after all, the problem is an individual problem. Each has his own particular fight to wage, his own peculiar burden to carry. Multiply the individual by so many thousands, the problem does but differ in degree, and not in kind. And the solution must, therefore, be capable of an infinite variety in its application; both containing elements which are common to the whole, and elements which may be fitted to the varying requirements of the individual. That solution, it would seem, must be attained by patient and unprejudiced tracing

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back from effects, which may be seen and studied in open daylight, to their invisible and complex causes. The causes once clearly apprehended, the remedies will reveal themselves.

But, at the same time, it is not to be supposed that the business is of a nature so recondite that it is beyond the grasp of, what is called, common sense. That way leads the intellectual indolence which is the bane of England. The author, indeed, cherishes a private belief (in which he has the countenance of the late Lord Palmerston—if of none else) that half-a-dozen Navy captains, given a map of the Empire and a free hand with that blind and worm-eaten idol, the British Constitution, would solve the problem inside a month. For, the calling of the naval officer accustoms him, as perhaps none other calling accustoms its followers, by force of circumstance and by austere training, to deal with emergencies as they arise, in the full knowledge that the penalty of failure is both immediate and final. But the politician is cast in a different mould. . . .

Moreover, the wisest and most courageous reformer must still be baulked of his achievement, until he has at his back a solid, driving weight of public opinion. It will, therefore, conduce to clearness of thought to recapitulate the principal aspects of the problem, whose

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solution is nothing less than a matter of life and death.

The whole mass of those who lack and suffer hunger and who are idle falls into three main categories, which are again divided into classes which shade one into the other.

There are, first, the honest workmen who are able and willing to take any job that is offered them. Now, it is to be remembered that these are not the men who make a noise and who march in ragged processions. They do not choose to be associated with the men who engage in these exercises. Nor do they care to advertise their need. Rather will they stay within doors (the blinds drawn), or quietly and alone pursue the unending search for work. They will sell the last item of household furniture, and the wife will pawn the ring from her roughened finger, before they will appeal to the Poor Law. They will not ask for charity. If their case be discovered by a friend in whom they trust, they will accept help, as from a friend; and nothing will serve but they must repay the gift by some service, if they may. Such persons are rare, you say. Not at all. They are merely hard to find, because they hide themselves.

The causes by which they were displaced are various. There is slackness in trade. Trades

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may be roughly divided into two classes : the seasonal and the permanent. In the case of seasonal trades, the season's earnings, in good times, have, until recently, been sufficient to support the workers during the intervals. But, of late years, generally speaking, trade has been so bad that the men of the seasonal trades have been working on short time during the season, and so have been able to save nothing. In the permanent trades, in times of depression, the elder and the less competent hands are discharged first, then the younger. They are the younger men out of employment who are the first to be taken on again ; so that the men of middle age, strong and skilled as they may be, though perhaps a little slower than the younger men, have small chance indeed.

To what causes the depression in trade is due, it is for economists to say. I am only dealing with the effects. But, I have found merchant seamen displaced by foreigners, who ship in a foreign port at a pound a month less than the rate of wages in Port of London ; glass-blowers in the street because German glass is largely imported ; even brickmakers starving—in one instance—because the brickfield, under the competition of foreign bricks delivered in England at half the price of English bricks, was given

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up; thousands of dock labourers existing on a day's work in a week, or a month, because the shipping is leaving the Port of London; boot-makers and hatters tramping in search of casual labour because their firms have quitted London; home-workers dying in their wretched homes, because the alien has lowered prices and captured the work.

There is also the displacement due to the invention of machinery. This happens every day. Even in such a business as coal-heaving, the new derricks can do the work of twenty men. The introduction of the linotype displaced hundreds of compositors. Instances might be multiplied indefinitely. In the result, the skilled labourer goes to join the immense army of the unskilled.

Another, and most fatal, cause of displacement, is the custom of employing boys at unskilled labour, at boys' wages, until they are eighteen or so, when they are promptly discharged to make room for more boys. There are thousands of sturdy youths of eighteen to twenty, or twenty-five, hopelessly trying to get unskilled work. Their parents have set them to earn so soon as they have left school, in order that the money may go into the common stock. As a rule, the parent is unable to pay for apprenticeship to a trade. Very often, whether he is able to pay or



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not, he never even entertains the notion. In plain words, the youth of England, after quitting school—the State school, be it remembered—is, after a few years of wage-earning, absolutely driven into idleness. So, ill-fed, unhelped, and desperate, they sink ere manhood into the irreclaimable.

And, in considering these things, we are to bear in mind that, even among honest workmen, are lack of thrift, excessive indulgence in beer, and total want of foresight. There are also the contributory factors of the total loss of insurance money, the premiums already paid being forfeited upon failure to renew payment—hence the immense, ill-gotten wealth of the working-class insurance companies—and the ineptitude of the trade unions, which strike from their list the men who can no longer pay subscriptions.

The category of men who would work, and cannot, contains a class which, in times of plenty, does as little as possible—under trade union influence and the drift of natural indolence. If there were any sort of discipline established in the organisation of labour, these men would be drilled to the standard of their worthier comrades.

Then, comes the huge class of the casual labourer. In such an instance as that of inter-

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mittent dock labour, the docker has become so accustomed to working short time, with liberal intervals, that he will not change his habits. Here, again, discipline is essential.

And the casual class shades into the class of the men who, while they do not absolutely refuse to work, decline to work during more than a day, or a couple of days at a time. The wife, or the child, does the rest. And so they merge into the second category, that of the men who will not work at all. Again, discipline is unmistakably indicated.

The category of the men who decline to work contains every variety of loafer and of vagrant. They need never starve. There are always the casual ward, the workhouse, the free shelter, the occasional copper, the sporadic charity. These men are a curse to the community upon which, parasites, they feed. They are also the bane of the honest workman, for they take care to get the benefit of every measure devised for his welfare, before it can reach him; and, as they are much in the public eye, the real man is lost to knowledge. Ask your decent workman what he thinks of the loafer. The whip and the flame will occur in his mildest expressions. Amid all the doubts and difficulties that obscure the whole problem, this at least is utterly beyond

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question. Before all, these men must be dealt with by stern and uncompromising discipline. Until they are separated out, segregated, and forced—quite simply forced—to work up to their own weight, and, if possible, up to the burden of the wretched wives and the doomed children whom they have imposed upon the State, no reform is even possible.

The third category consists of those who cannot work: of the aged and of the afflicted. With these, a reformed Poor Law should be adequate to deal. The present amorphous bundle of statutes which together make up the Law under which the nation has expended two hundred and eighty-six millions during the last twenty-seven years cannot, under the most enlightened administration—a kind of administration which is not the rule—rightly meet the case. It never has, and it never will. So long as the honest poor prefer starvation before entering the workhouse, while a whole army of the able-bodied absorb in idleness vast sums which were never intended for them, the system must be damned.

How many of us (unknown to the politician, or by him ignored) are conscious to-day of a certain chronic exasperation? We cannot but believe that these great evils, which are eating into the

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heart of England, do actually fall within the power of man to extirpate. It must be so. Reduce the case to its lowest denomination. Suppose that a rich man, owning a great estate, had within his borders two or three honest men who had nothing to do, a dozen sturdy rogues, and half-a-dozen aged or afflicted poor? Is it conceivable that, if our Dives were a man of some intelligence and of a kindly nature, he would be absolutely impotent to deal rightly with these people? That he would sit beside his fire and prattle about the operation of natural causes, and the independence of the individual, and of his acute personal sympathy with sorrow? Not he.

Then, why should England?



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